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मुखं किमस्य कौ बाहू का ऊरू पादा उच्येते ॥ ११ ॥
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caste

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ORIGIN, FUNCTION AND DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

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SUVIRA JAISWAL

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To
the memory of
my parents

Contents

Preface

The pertinacity of the institution of caste continues to pose serious problems in the restructuring of Indian society into a more egalitarian system by eliminating the traditional practice of discrimination on account of birth and gender. To understand the reasons of its continued stranglehold, it is necessary to unfold the contextual nature of its dynamics, which has regulated social relations and shaped consciousness of its constituents. The present work is an attempt in that direction. It has grown out of some of the articles I had written over the years on the theme of social stratification and these have been incorporated here with some additions. Chapter 1 and much of Chapter 4 have been especially written for the monograph.

The work begins with a critique of the current theories of caste system, which locate its essence in endogamy, and argues that the present morphology of caste is the result of transitions and transformations the institution had to undergo in specific social contexts through centuries of its existence; but its origins are embedded in the processes of patriarchy and state formation from which it cannot be delinked. Endogamy is seen not as a borrowing or survival of pre-Aryan or tribal practices but as intrinsic to the process of stratification and establishment of a patriarchal society. It is argued that Vedic rituals provide enough evidence to justify this assertion.

I have tried to dilineate the origins of the varṇa caste structure from its early Vedic beginnings to its development into a pan-Indian phenomenon and argued that the separation of the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* elite categories and ascription of higher status to the former, which feature forms the bedrock of Louis

Dumount's *Homo Hierarchicus* and is crucial for his ideological interpretation of caste, has its roots in the ecology of the early Vedic cattle-keepers. India has had an unbroken history from the early Vedic times, and hence religious and cultural symbols may suggest continuity but their real significance has undergone fundamental changes.

The work examines the historical specificities which led to the emergence of the varṇas and their crystallization into castes. The process of the construction of segmented identities within each varṇa category, which accommodated regional divergences and allowed sufficient flexibility to suit politico-economic requirements, is also indicated. It is pointed out that in many areas the role of the agent in spreading the varṇa system was played not so much by the members of the brāhmaṇa caste as by the dominant non-brāhmaṇa community or the ruling elite, which benefited from the notions of hierarchy. This circumstance is, in my opinion, largely responsible for the phenomenon of 'unity in diversity'. These developments had important implications at the level of social relations as well as theory. Caste ideology has undergone significant conceptual modifications over the centuries without, however, abandoning its basic principles. Thus, for example, the meaning of the term 'śudra' shows considerable variation both in time and space.

Chapter 2 of the monograph is devoted to a re-evaluation of historical and sociological writings of the post-Independence period on caste; and among other things, it seriously contests certain ideological interpretations of the roots of untouchability.

Chapter 3 along with its appendix examines the evidence and paradigms used for the study of stratification in Ṛgvedic society and subjects the avant-garde concepts of 'lineage society' and 'lineage mode of production' to a critical analysis. It is pointed out that the exploitation of biologically determined 'junior' age and sex groups by the elders of the same lineage is qualitatively very different from the exploitation of junior lineages by senior lineages in a stratified society, where kinship is merely a metaphor for class. The importance of this distinction is to be kept in mind while reconstructing a picture of Ṛgvedic society. The chapter also discusses the question of ethnicity of the Aryans.

The fourth chapter deals with the social stratification in early Buddhist sources and highlights the changing concept of *gṛhapati/gahapati* category. It is shown that the early Vedic *gṛhapati* was not an ordinary householder but a leader of the extended kin-group which constituted a unit of production as well as consumption, and as such he, along with his wife *gṛhapatnī*, was responsible for its ritual and material needs. But in the early Buddhist sources the *gṛhapati* emerges as an important entrepreneur who organizes the cultivation of large tracts of land with slaves and hired labour and is an important tax payer. He is not an ordinary householder or peasant and the category is not to be confused with that of *gṛhastha*. There is a gradual degradation of the *gṛhapati* class in the subsequent epoch, which may be connected with the processes leading to the emergence of segmented identities within the broad category of the Vaiśya varṇa. The paradigm of varṇa/*jāti* is well established by the early centuries of the Christian era.

The final chapter argues that it was the brahmanical paradigm of social integration formalized as caste which came to define the Hindu identity as it emerged in confrontation with the 'other' in medieval times. Hence, not only the religious and the social are closely intertwined in Hinduism but caste continues to be its constitutive element and its identification mark. Failure to confront directly the social reality of multiple fragmented identities and attempts to unify them only through religious-cultural symbolisms ultimately defeat the lofty aims of social movements, as in the case of the Arya Samaj, which despite its theoretical denial of caste could no succeed in establishing an egalitarian, universal Arya brotherhood.

Substantial portion of Chapters 2 and 3 were published in the *Indian Historical Review*, Vols. VI, XVI and XX. Much of the Chapter 5 had appeared in the *Social Scientist*, Vol. XIX, No. 12 (Dec. 1991). Permission to reprint these with additions, wherever necessary, is duly acknowledged.

I hope the work would be of interest to students of history and sociology as well as to general readers.

I wish to thank Shri P.N. Sahay, Librarian, Indian Council of Historical Research for prompt assistance in locating the books and journals. The staff of the JNU Library and CHS DSA Library also deserve my thanks. I am particularly thankful to my student Ranjan Anand for preparing the bibliography and to my publishers for bringing out the book expeditiously.

15 January 1998 SUVIRA JAISWAL

1

Introduction

CASTE IDENTITIES HAVE SURFACED AS a powerful force in contemporary Indian politics and demands for redressal of the inequalities and exploitation engendered by this old institution have stimulated much fresh thinking in academic circles on the question of the essence and dynamics of caste. It is often assumed that a caste mentality is embedded in 'the Indian psyche'. Hence even as traditional notions of its integration with religion, morality and law are being increasingly challenged (and even repudiated in modern circumstances), the caste structure continues to survive as a salient feature of Indian society.[1] This inference is further strengthened by the studies[2] of the Indian Diaspora where despite the absence of notions of hierarchy and hereditary occupational specialization—features intrinsic to the traditional caste system—the morphology of caste is seen to prevail owing to the 'separation', 'repulsion' or recognition of 'difference' of one caste from another. Castes retain separate identities but are related to each other as constituent units of a wider Hindu community. Thus, it is claimed,[3] empirical studies have demonstrated the inadequacies of earlier Indological-sociological formulations of caste as a hierarchical social system rooted in a religious principle that imputed inherently pure or polluting status to social groups, legitimized by the doctrine of *karma*. Theories which looked upon the institution as a system devised to ensure harmonious functioning of a non-competitive, interdependent process of production, which obviated economic, class-conflicts in a pre-capitalist social formation are also found to be inadequate. The concept of caste has been reformulated and Dipankar Gupta defines it as a 'form

of differentiation wherein the constituent units of system justify endogamy on the basis of putative biological differences which are semaphored by the ritualization of multiple social practices'.[4] This definition according to him gives the 'essence' of a system composed of discrete categories and not a continuous hierarchy.

Thus recent changes in the caste system have led sociologists to revive what Dumont had termed the 'atomistic'[5] view of caste, with the rider that although discrete, castes do not exist in isolation but form part of a system which gives them meaning and sustains their existence. Legitimation and perpetuation of endogamy become the basic characteristics, the 'essence' of caste, in this perception. Celestine Bougle's[6] precise definition of caste epitomizing its major features into three saliences, occupational specialization on a hereditary basis, hierarchical status gradation, and 'repulsion', that is, separation of each social group from the others through commensal and connubial restrictions, was reduced by Louis Dumont[7] to one: 'hierarchy' deriving from the opposition of the pure and the impure. For, according to Dumont other features of caste were subsumed within this basic principle. The trend is now to regard the feature of 'repulsion' or 'difference' or 'division' as the key concept, supposedly maintained through 'hyper-symbolism', a cluster of characteristics differentiating each caste from the other in social and ritual matters but not occupation, the criterion laid down in the Indological works.[8]

However, the history of the caste system shows that belief in 'putative biological differences', which are expressed through a ritualization of divergent social practices, has not acted as an impediment in transcending the rules of endogamy and the formation of new castes when material conditions bring together families of diverse caste origin but similar socio-economic background. The formation of the Kāyastha caste in early medieval times is a case in point, as literate professionals drawn from different varṇas/castes crystallized into a caste of scribes. For a correct understanding of the dynamics of the caste system we must pay attention not only to 'repulsion' or 'fragmentation' of castes but also to the processes of fusion which allow this institution to continue and even strengthen itself as social, political and economic circumstances change. For example, in

the overseas context, in Trinidad varṇa categories have come to replace caste as the endogamous unit and status referrent.[9] No doubt endogamy is basic to the morphology of caste but for its origin and sustenance one has to look beyond hypersymbolic manifestations and other ideational explanations which merely beg the question by making it an attribute of the Indian mentality. As we shall try to show, endogamy evolved gradually and acquired rigidity with the growth of patriarchy in a varṇa-based class society.

A major problem is that even Marxist historians who regard caste as class on a primitive level of production[10] have ignored the role of patriarchy and subjugation of women in its ideology and rules of endogamy. Endogamy is looked upon as a borrowing or survival of pre-Aryan or non-Aryan tribal practices. D.D. Kosambi writes that the fusion of tribal elements into society at large lies at the very foundation of the caste system;[11] Irfan Habib concurs,[12] suggesting that when tribes were absorbed they brought with them their endogamous customs and this happened 'only after the division of labour had reached a particular level of development within the "general society"'.[13] Perhaps this means that after stratification had emerged in the form of varṇa divisions, assimilation of tribal groups led to the institution of an endogamous caste structure. Kosambi is more specific with regards to the time frame and he traces the origin of endogamy to the incorporation of Aryans and pre-Aryan Harappans in one civil society.

I have shown elsewhere[14] that the views of D.D. Kosambi on the origins of the caste system are more in the nature of tentative probings. They are contradictory and difficult to sustain in the face of rigorous analysis. The fact that in later times incorporation of tribal groups in to the 'general society' meant the transformation of tribes into endogamous castes merely shows that assimilation could take place only on the terms and patterns of caste society. The assumption that the social structure as a whole became stratified into endogamous units owing to the entry of tribal groups is perilously close to the racial explanation of caste so vigorously propounded by Herbert Risley.[15] Kosambi's perception of the unchanging nature of Indus valley civilization has been rightly criticized[16] by Morton Klass, whose own

hypothesis regarding the origin of caste explains endogamy as fossilization of a prehistoric South Asian aboriginal practice. The work of Morton Klass has been acclaimed[17] as a major study providing a materialist explanation of the origin of caste and hence deserves a detailed scrutiny.

Klass raises a pertinent point in his debate with sociologists ('the apostles of synchrony or even achrony'), asking whether it is possible to know what the caste system is without first asking how it came to be. He emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of the problem. His own search, however, leads him beyond all documented evidence to four or more millennia ago, to 'totemic', 'equalitarian' clan groups. Klass suggests that in prehistoric times South Asian regions were inhabited by a galaxy of equalitarian endogamous social groups, each internally characterized by full and undifferentiated membership and constituting a single 'marriage-circle', in which prosperity and misfortune were shared by all. Many of these endogamous societies were composed of equalitarian exogamous segments or clans. Initially, all were at the gathering and hunting stage, with no significant economic specialization or exchange of goods and services. In the following millennium food production began in the favourable ecological zones, with the cultivation of rice or hard grain, and plants and animals were domesticated. The new technology provided these areas with 'absolute surplus', that is, the ability to produce continually more than what was required for subsistence. This development placed those corporate groups, who were in possession of cultivable land in an advantageous position vis-a-vis those who did not have such land. The latter began to exchange their labour and services for access to cultivable land and crops. Since both the possessors and non-possessors were structured in egalitarian clans, the network of exchange had a corporate character. Labour and services were provided not on individual but corporate basis with prosperity and misfortune being shared equally by all members of the clan. Thus a hierarchy of corporate groups developed owing to unequal access and control of economic resources. This led to a transition from 'clan to caste' or from 'Bear to Barber', borrowing the language of Leví Strauss. Klass traces not only caste endogamy but even *jajmāni* relations to prehistoric times. According to him the

system emerged not in any one specific region but over the entire subcontinent almost simultaneously. For, while wheat and other hard grains were being cultivated in the north-western part of the subcontinent, rice was cultivated in the eastern and southern regions. 'The caste system came into existence *not* in Bengal or the Malabar Coast or the Indus Valley, but over the entire subcontinent' about the same time.[18]

No doubt Klass is right in emphasizing the important role of differential access to basic resources and economic inequality of corporate groups in the emergence of the caste system; but his assumption that the system originated in prehistoric times when tribes living in 'unfavourable' zones migrated in search of fertile land and crops and almost voluntarily entered into subordinate or 'service' relations with the communities in possession of the basic resources and practising new technology, is not only conjectural but goes against the well-documented pattern of agricultural expansion in ancient as well as more recent times. The introduction of agriculture by neolithic-chalcolithic peoples on the subcontinent also involved clearing the primeval vegetation and forests, which would destroy the habitats of hunters and gatherers. The latter had to come to terms with the new way of life by either adopting the new technology or becoming marginalized as menial labourers or predators sticking to their earlier way of life. The process accelerated with the advent of iron technology. For instance, in the Mewar region of Rajasthan a section of Bhils has adopted agriculture and become the peasant caste of Gamits, which no longer has any social interaction with the Bhils of the hills and forests. This is a classic example of the disintegration or fission of a tribal community with one of its segments transforming itself into an endogamous caste, not because the segment had been earlier an endogamous marriage-circle, but because it integrated with a stratified, fragmented caste society which practised endogamy and as such provided it a separate niche.[19]

Moreover, it may be pointed out that agricultural surplus became available in several tribal regions of the subcontinent without their developing a caste system, untill the introduction of brahmanical culture and ideology. To give one example, recent

studies suggest [20] that the Assam plains had a tribal peasantry consisting of the Mikirs, Kukis, Khasis,and Kochch-Kacharis who practised cultivation on a permanent basis in the pre-Ahom period; but their assimilation in the caste system apparently took place with the 'creation of a dominant class of brahmin landholders' and penetration of brahmanic ideology.

Further, Klass' hypothesis of 'clan to caste' does not explain the emergence of the priestly caste of brāhmaṇas from the 'clan' stage. They could hardly have constituted a separate 'marriage-circle' in prehistoric societies, unless we attribute to them sufficient advance in the specialization of services and exchange of goods to maintain a non-food producing 'marriage-circle'. To sustain a specialized endogamous 'clan' or 'marriage-circle' of priests, and not just one or two priestly lineages of a tribal community, there has to be sufficient 'absolute surplus' available. On the other hand, if the formation of the brāhmaṇa caste is explained as coming together of the 'exogamous segments' of prehistoric endogamous communities and their crystallization into a sacred caste, this would imply fission and fusion connected with occupational specialization and stratification. Such a development would hardly be confined to priestcraft alone, particularly as stratification was not just a matter of 'difference' but the consequence of growing control and manipulation of the sacred and temporal domains by a few tribal lineages. Klass is certainly correct in endorsing the view of Barth that the value system or 'the cognitive changes follow upon the social and interactional changes',[21] but this does not explain the existence of a large caste of brāhmaṇas from the very beginning; the caste system can hardly antedate the caste of brāhmaṇas![22]

In fact the evolution of the caste system cannot be delinked from the emergence of patriarchy, class divisions, and state; and as this did not happen at the same time all over the subcontinent, one cannot speak of its simultaneous appearance in different regions of the country. I have argued that regional variations in the system may be partly explained by the time lag. The argument which locates its essence in endogamy overlooks the fact that occupational specialization and hierarchical gradation along with the suppression of women as a class have played a no less crucial role in the formation of caste society and in regulating its internal

intercommunal relationships.[23] If endogamy alone out of its three defining characteristics[24] endures in contemporary times, the phenomenon needs to be explained with reference to changing relations of production in a changed material milieu.[25]

Recently the theory of the Dravidian origin of caste has been revived on two grounds: First, it is assumed[26] that the scheme of *tinais* mentioned in the Śangam literature represents a caste-like or 'proto-caste' stage as it speaks of five different types of environmental zones peopled by divergent communities practising different modes of production, depending on the nature of their basic resources. Thus, the inhabitants of *kurunji-tinai* were Kānavar, Kunuvar and Veṭar subsisting on hunting and gathering, those of the *pālai* or desert-land lived by plunder and cattle raids, and were known as Kaḷavar, Eyinār and Maṟavar. The Āyar and Idiayar occupied the *mullai-tinai* or pastoral tract and practised shifting agriculture and animal husbandry, whereas plough cultivation was the technology used by the Uḻavar and Toḻuvar in the *marutam-tinai* or fertile wetland. The fifth type of *tinai* was the *neital* or coastal tracts peopled by Paratavar, Valayar and Mīnavar, who depended on fishing and salt extraction. Increasing interaction and interdependence among these socio-cultural groups with 'fundamentally different systems of settlement and subsistence' is seen as resulting in the caste system in which each community remained encapsulated, retaining its separate identity even as it entered into intercommunity relationships.

Nevertheless, unlike the caste system, the concept of *tinai*[27] relates to physiographical divisions with the inhabitants of each region practising a different mode of production. They are not part of the same civil society. Economic needs did require a certain amount of interaction (exchange of goods), but there is no status gradation or hierarchy of *tinais* or of communities although the polity and subsistence pattern of different regions does show a great deal of uneven development with some still at the segmentary lineage stage and the region of *marutam* supported a much more complex organization verging on state formation. The notion of *tinaimayakkam* suggests that at the ideological level the process of integrating diverse communities into one cultural whole had begun, but the absence of any notion of hierarchy and the location of communities in different eco-zones makes this mechanism of

integration essentially different from the brahmanical caste system which had already taken firm shape in the Gangetic region when Śangam literature was being composed. The presence of brāhmaṇas following Vedic traditions in the tribal chiefdoms is well attested in the Śangam classics; and it seems plausible that the northern caste ideology found a fertile ground in the fluid social conditions of the south to grow and evolve into specific forms in the subsequent centuries.

The other argument in favour of Dravidian origins rests on the assumption that the idea of pollution from certain social groups derives from Dravidian culture which visualized the sacred as something malevolent and dangerous, a quality that could be transmitted to all who mediated with it. Hence contact with aboriginal shamans and musicians was considered harmful and 'polluting' and to be avoided by relegating them to a low-caste status. Women too were considered as polluted and polluting at times, for they were deemed as possessed with 'sacred power' manifested in their capacity of reproduction and a different biological rhythm. Therefore, various taboos were imposed on them to control their sexuality and keep them in patriarchal bondage. George L. Hart[28] is the principal exponent of this view, which I have criticized in detail elsewhere[29] and will not repeat except to add a couple of points. Heesterman has shown that the *dīkṣita* (a consecrated person engaged in the performance of a Vedic sacrifice), too was conceived as possessing 'dangerous sacredness'[30] at least in the initial stages of the development of Vedic sacrifice. The Śrauta Sūtras[31] lay down that one should not accept the food of a *dīkṣita*, nor wear his garments nor touch him, not because it would defile the consecrated one but because the 'evil (*pāpam*)' or 'guilt' of the *dīkṣita* would fall on the one who eats his food, touches him and so on. Heesterman is of the view that the *dīkṣita* is clearly regarded as 'impure'[32] and Gonda[33] agrees. Apparently with the growth of a more complex society and the emergence of the brāhmaṇas as exclusive ritual specialists and ideologues, such ideas were inverted to suit a hierarchical social structure and what was earlier a magical,[34] 'dangerous' and 'impure' state came to be seen as the purest state, the prerogative of the highest social group. Although Vedic sacrifice could be performed by all the three upper varṇas, the Śrauta Sūtras clearly state that the consecrated person even if he belongs to the *rājanya* or vaiśya varṇa should be proclaimed a brāhmaṇa as long

as he remains in this state.[35] Incidentally, this also shows that the idea of sacredness as potentially dangerous and harmful was not confined to the Dravidian ethos; traces of it are found among 'authentic Aryans'.

With regards to women too, recent studies[36] have shown that female sexuality posed both 'physical and metaphysical' problems to Vedic priesthood, which invented devices to minimize and displace the role of the female in the systematization of Vedic rituals in their Śrauta form. The notion of the female biological rhythm being inherently impure is the outcome of a patriarchal outlook; and ethnological studies have shown that many Indian tribes do not observe the menstrual taboo, until the tribe is integrated into caste society.[37]

It appears that patriarchy was not superadded to the varṇa/class structure in Vedic times but was intrinsic to the process of stratification; and caste endogamy was not just a borrowing or continuation of aboriginal tribal practices, but came to be constructed in an effort to regulate and reproduce patriarchy as well as the hierarchy of social groups. The Ṛgvedic evidence is clear on patriliny and patrilocality but patriarchy is not well-established. Hence, we come across contradictory evidence suggesting egalitarian gender relations[38] on the one hand and attempts to restrict and deride women on the other. We are told in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda* that in ancient times women used to go to the communal sacrifice (*saṃhotra*) and community festival (*samana*).[39] Indrāṇī, the wife of Indra, is described not only as the mother of brave sons but also as the maker of *ṛta*,[40] interpreted variously as 'law', 'tribal law', 'truth' and 'sacrifice'. Similarly, goddess Sinīvālī is described as *viśpatnī*, the protector or mistress of the *viś*.[41] The hymn praises her as the sister of gods (*svasā*), indicating the important position of the sister as *viśpatnī*. That the idea of control possession or protection was implied in the term *patnī* is also evident in *AV*, II.12.1 which speaks of *kṣetrasya-patnī*, the mistress of the field. A verse[42] found in the seventh *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda* describes a young woman (*yuvati*) going to the powerful sacrificial fire morning and night of her own accord (*svā*), to offer oblations (*havis*) and ghee (*ghṛtāci*) with devotion (*aramati*), in her search for wealth (*vasūyuḥ*). A maiden growing old in the parental home is said to be entitled to a measured portion of wealth (*bhāga*),[43]

and a prayer[44] is offered for both sons and daughters by the side of the *dampati* decked with ornaments of gold. Such passages give the impression that unlike later times, daughters were not unwelcome and enjoyed a degree of freedom and autonomy.

Nevertheless, a few passages[45] of the *Ṛgveda* seem to present a brotherless girl in an unfavourable light. She is described as pursuing men in search of a husband. According to Hanns-Peter Schmidt[46] a girl without a brother found it difficult to get married: her son would be claimed by her father to continue his lineage and would thereby be lost to her husband's lineage. The institutionalization of this custom is evident in later Vedic texts which speak of the appointment of a brotherless daughter as *putrikā* so that her son (*putrikāputra*) may inherit her father's property, carry forward his lineage, and perform ritual services for his maternal grandfather. Schmidt notes the prevalence of similar customs among the ancient Greeks, Romans and Persians despite there being certain important differences in marriage rules, such as exogamy in India, which meant that the girl would have to be married to an outsider and the wealth of the sonless father would go to a different family. This accounts for aversion for girls without brothers in the Indian sources, according to Schmidt. He suggests that the disapproval of law-givers such as Gautama, Manu and Yājñavalkya, of marriage with a *putrikā* indicates their support of the claims of the extended family over the wealth or estate of the sonless father,which attitude goes back to Ṛgvedic times. If this interpretation of the Ṛgvedic passages is accepted, it would mean that a woman's paramount obligation was to reproduce and continue the lineage of her husband and in exceptional circumstances that of her father, but that her sexuality was already under patriarchal control.

Earlier, Irawati Karve[47] had explained Ṛgvedic descriptions of a brotherless maiden's attempts at husband-hunting by visualizing an archaic stage in which sisters and brothers were marriage mates, the terms 'brother' and 'sister' being used in a classificatory sense denoting young boys and girls of the same generation in the clan. Thus brotherless women had to look for husbands outside their clan. She supports her arguments with examples culled from Vedic and Puranic literature and holds that the taboo on brother-sister marriage was later extended to classificatory brothers, the endogamous

patriarchal clan becoming strictly exogamous. In Karve's view the institution of *putrikā-putra* initially involved incestual union between father and daughter in exceptional circumstances, and did not imply a general stage of promiscuity. Similar customs prevailed among the commoners of ancient Iran too.[48] 'The process of establishing incestuous taboos unravels before our eyes in Vedic literature', she remarks.[49]

The question of the evolution of clan exogamy among Vedic Aryans is a highly controversial one. Scholars such as S.V. Karandikar,[50] Irawati Karve[51] and G.S. Ghurye[52] have forcefully argued that group or clan exogamy was unknown to the Vedic Aryans when they came to India and that they borrowed it from the indigenous people; for clan exogamy is found among almost all tribes of the subcontinent. Ghurye points out that no other speakers of the Indo-European languages are known to have practised group exogamy and the Roman *gens* were not exogamous units. On the other hand Benveniste[53] and John Brough[54] maintain that clan exogamy prevailed in Ṛgvedic times and that the brahmanic *gotra* exogamy was inherited from Indo-European forebears. Whatever may be the case, the establishment of patrilocality and clan exogamy would no doubt have resulted in the strengthening of patriarchal trends[55] and increased subordination of women. The *Ṛgveda* provides clear evidence of the fact that a girl had to move out of her maternal residence on marriage and live with her husband's people. In my opinion the description[56] of the members of the bridegroom's party as *janyāḥ* (persons belonging to a different *jana*), in the *Atharvaveda* may suggest that the bridegroom belonged to a different *jana*. Elsewhere, I have referred to the interpretation of the term *janyamitra* by Heesterman as a relative by marriage.[57] It is interesting that in such passages the term used is *jana* and not 'viś', which is generally interpreted as 'clan'. It may not be without significance that the wife is called *janī*. In the context of marriage *jana* seems to have had special significance.

Along with the growth of patriarchy, later Vedic sources provide clear evidence for the splitting of Vedic tribes and the emergence of varṇa categories through processes of fusion and fission, both horizontal and vertical. The *Ṛgveda* occasionally speaks of *rājās*

in the plural[58] but this need not be construed as the structuring of Vedic tribes into senior and junior lineages, as the category of *rājā* may have merely referred to the head or 'chief' of a clan or lineage assembled for deliberations, without implying the gradation of lineages. The use of *rājanya*, a diminutive of *rājan*, in the Puruṣa-sukta hymn,[59] however, clearly shows the emergence of the kinsmen of the *rājā* as a distinct social category, standing above the common tribesmen, the *viś* or the vaiśyas. This is a conspicuously recognizable category in the *Atharvaveda* and other later Vedic sources. Nevertheless, the extent to which the principle of seniority in genealogical reckoning contributed to this phenomenon is disputable. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, which belongs to the latest stratum of later Vedic literature and makes little distinction between the *rājanya* and the kṣatriya, contains some passages wherein it is stated that the *kṣatra* arose out of the *viś*[60] and for the sake of victory the *kṣatra* and the *viś* should eat from the same vessel.[61] These statements are interpreted as reminiscent of earlier closer genealogical links of the *rājan*/kṣatriya with the *viś*. Yet, it is significant that the term *rājanya* was gradually replaced by 'kṣatriya'. Whereas the former stressed kinship with the *rājan* or ruler, the term *kṣatra*[62] or kṣatriya referred to 'rulership', 'power' or 'control' over the dominion, and suggests the emergence of this varṇa category through the fusion of the *rājanya* lineages of several tribes.

Brahmanical sacrificial ritual seems to have played a crucial role in this development. R.S. Sharma points out that 'the genealogical superiority of the *rājanya* over the *viś* is not advanced as a ground for claiming tributes', and in his opinion 'forcible methods adopted by the descendants of the elected chiefs led to social distancing which was frozen into genealogical ideology at a much later stage'.[63] By the close of the later Vedic period the varṇas were being clearly distinguished on the basis of the three fundamental characteristics of caste organization: hierarchy, inherited occupational specialization and endogamy. Brāhmaṇa lineages were systematized into *gotra-pravara* categories in the *Baudhayāna Śrauta Sūtra*, and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* tells us that a kṣatriya is born of a kṣatriya, a vaiśya from a vaiśya and a śūdra from a śūdra.[64] The concrete identity of brāhmaṇas at the

time of Alexander's invasion is attested in Greek accounts of a country of Brachmans conquered by Alexander. K.P. Jayaswal[65] identified this land with the *janapada* named Brāhmaṇaka mentioned by Patañjali. However, inter-varṇa mariages of hypergamous type were allowed to royalty and the three wives of the later Vedic king at whose residences he offered oblations to appropriate deities are supposed to have belonged to three different varṇas.[66] Even in the time of the Buddha, marriage between brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya families was permissible.

Jātis emerged within the varṇa system through fragmentation as well as the incorporation of tribal communities within a structure which regulated hierarchy through marriage rules and endogamy, and privileged heredity or birth in a particular lineage, leading to the use of the term *'jāti'* for indicating membership in a particular community.[67] Thus varṇas were extended to provide the institutional and ideological base for the growth of a wider society. To quote Meillassoux, 'contradictions inherent in the co-existence and development of the rival classes' and foreign intrusions and conquests led to the rise of a new status system of *jātis* deriving from the earlier varṇa system, and it was at once 'more flexible and arbitrary' and could be applied 'to a fragmented society by any fractions of the dominant classes whatever their origin'.[68]

The earliest use of the term *jāti* in connection with a varṇa is found in the *Nirukta*[69] which is regarded as pre-Pāṇini and speaks of a woman of a śūdra *jāti*. It is not clear whether this is a reference to the varṇa/caste, or to a tribe of the same name, for a tribe of this name existed in the north-west down to the time of Alexander's invasion. The transformation of this tribal name into a generic varna category is elaborately delineated by R.S. Sharma in his classic work *Śūdras in Ancient India*. However, clear evidence of the existence of distinct social groups subsumed within the śūdra varṇa in a hierarchical relationship is to be seen in a sūtra of Pāṇini which speaks[70] of *aniravasita* śūdras. Commenting on the sutra Patañjali explains that the metal vessels used for eating purposes by *aniravasita* śūdras such as the Gandikas, Śakas and Yavanas may be purified (by fire, etc.), but those used by the *niravasita* śūdras cannot be purified through any process,[71] and Cāṇḍālas and

Mṛtapās are cited as examples of the latter group. Thus subdivisions of the śūdras and a hierarchy of their relative impurity is clearly enunciated in this text of the second century BC. In the eyes of the orthodox brāhmaṇa all those who were outside or at the margin of brahmanical society could be none other than śūdras, for the varṇa system was a universal concept defining not only human but also the divine and vegetational worlds.[72] Yet widely divergent social, economic and cultural levels of assimilating groups and material expediencies led to the invention of the concepts of *vrātya* and *varṇasaṃkara*, that is, formation of separate castes due to non-performance of the sacred duty[73] or because of the mixed marriages of original founder couples; and these theoretical devices were highly successful in extending the varṇa system into the *jāti* system. These explanations also led to a dilution or modification of the varṇa concepts and we have shown[74] how the notions of 'vaiśya' and 'śūdra' acquired new meanings in the changed material conditions, which favoured a shift from the relative purity of function to relative purity of birth implied in the transition from varṇa to *jātī*.[75]

However, available evidence suggests that territorial and occupational differences played a major role in the emergence of segmented identities, particularly within the brāhmaṇa and the vaiśya varṇas, as castes ranked within these categories generally emphasize their specialization in a particular craft or tradition of learning[76] or their territorial[77] affiliation. Adoption in the kṣatriya varṇa was necessitated by the arrival of new ruling and powerful groups, foreign as well as indigenous, which required constant adjustments. The presence of descendants of dominant ruling lineages of the later Vedic age in the north-west is indicated by certain tribal coins of the second and first centuries BC which carry the legend 'of the country of *rājanyas*' (*rājañā janapadas*).[78] The *rājanyas* would have contributed mainly to the formation of professional armies of the post-Vedic monarchies. A distinction is made sometimes between the *rājanyas* and kṣatriyas, which fact suggests that the former were splinter groups of Vedic tribes proud of their lineages, and the latter a more general category bringing together all those who had access to power, status and war-like professions. For example, the *khattiya*, brāhmaṇa and

rājañña (*rājanya*) are enumerated separately in a passage of the *Majjhima-Nikāya*[79] which contrasts them with the low-born Caṇḍālas and *neṣādas*. The *Kāśikā*, commenting on a sūtra of Pāṇini explains that although the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇis were kṣatriyas, the term *rājanya* was applied only to those who belonged to specially consecrated families.[80] It cites the example of Dvaipya and Haimāyana, who were not called *rājanyas* even though they were obviously kṣatriyas.[81]

The ruling groups of the *gaṇa-rājyas* of the age of the Buddha were very conscious of their kṣatriya ancestry. Thus the remark of the Buddha that although brāhmaṇas could adopt a son who had partial non-brāhmaṇa blood from either parent, the kṣatriyas would refuse to accept as their equal anyone who was not of pure birth for seven generations on either side.[82] Purity of descent was of vital concern to the ruling class of the *gaṇa-rājyas*, as access to political power depended upon it. Thus, whereas identity of interests and professional solidarity led to the integration of ruling segments of tribes into a *rājanya*/kṣatriya varṇa, excessive emphasis on the purity of lineage could also contribute to the formation of subdivisions within its fold. The specific lineage names of the ruling groups of the *gaṇa-rājyas* are often coupled with the term *jāti* (Śākya *jāti*, Licchavi *jāti*, Koliya *jāti* and so on). These are ranked as kṣatriya in general, but cannot be seen as constituting kṣatriya *jātis* in the later sense of the term, as they were not separate endogamous units but married freely among themselves without notions of hierarchy or hypergamy within their own ranks.[83] In this context *jāti* seems to have been used in a purely literal sense to emphasize the hereditary status of the lineage. However Manu provides clear evidence[84] of the existence of *jātis* within the kṣatriya varṇa and the *jāti* structure within the fold of the varṇa system seems to have evolved a few centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. Multiple factors contributed to its expansion over the subcontinent in the course of time. A recent survey lists as many as 3539 communities (which are euphemistically called *samudāyas* avoiding the term *jāti*) among present-day Hindus.[85]

Discussing the proliferation of castes[86] in early medieval times R.S. Sharma attributes to the practice of making landgrants to brāhmaṇas in aboriginal areas, the function of a catayst: it led to the

employment of the backward local people as landless labourers and agriculturists in a land-based feudal system of production, and to their classification as śūdra castes by the brahmanical law-givers. The agency of brāhmaṇas in imposing varṇa-caste categories is emphasized, although it is recognized that acculturation was not one-sided. Sharma explains the rise of Tantricism as a consequence of brāhmaṇa-tribe interaction. But in several areas the initiative seems to have come from a rising class of tribal nobility when certain communities were exposed to socio-economic and political stimuli from more advanced regions and began to go through a process of state formation. Kulke[87] calls this 'kṣatriyaization', which, he carefully explains, does not mean merely imitating the kṣatriya way of life but social change 'from above' initiated in tribal areas 'by the kṣatriyas, that is, zamindars, chiefs, or rājās, in order to strengthen their legitimation as Hindu rājās in their own society and to broaden the basis of their economic and political power',[88] in other words, by tribal nobility to further their own material interests. Kulke points out that in many areas local languages were far more important than Sanskrit in spreading this cultural pattern and that the agents of 'Brahmanization' were not always brāhmaṇas. Kulke's remarks are based on his study of medieval Orissa, but may apply to other regions going through the process of state formation in early medieval times. A recent study[89] has shown how the Rayalaseema area of south-western Andhra Pradesh, which had been populated by hunters and gatherers, acquired a strategic importance in the regional power struggle between the Cālukyas of Badami in north Karnataka and the Pallavas of Kāñcī in the eighth and ninth centuries and was thus exposed to the influence of advanced cultures. There gradually unfolded transition from tribe to state, leading to the rise of tribal chieftaincies; and the tribal communities were transformed into a stratified society with the growth of a political nobility exercising control over land. This new class patterned itself on the brahmanical model, which helped legitimize their separation from the commonality of tribesmen and demanded their allegiance. No less important was the fact that it gave them 'scope to operate on a larger social space'. Thus, the varṇa/caste model of social

stratification was adopted by the rising elite which also deliberately promoted the regional language, in this case Telugu, as it gave a new sense of unity cutting across earlier tribal affiliations and enabled them to face the challenge of neighbouring Cālukya and Pallava powers. It is argued that at least in the initial stages the presence of brāhmaṇas in the region was insufficient to establish strong bases of Sanskritic learning and that the Jaina and Śaiva sects played an important role in the development of Telugu language and the spread of a pan-Indian 'great culture'. We may add that by this time Jainism too had thoroughly imbibed the varṇa ideology[90] and while one occasionally comes across passages which challenge caste hierarchy, caste identities are taken for granted.

Thus the adoption of the brahmanical social scheme in diverse regional conditions resulted in different culture zones having widely divergent structural categories of caste. Unity in this diversity was provided by the caste ideology, which, as we have shown, underwent certain conceptual modifications in a changed material milieu without needing to alter its basic principles. Many factors contributed to the multiplicity of castes. The splitting of immigrant groups from parent bodies, crystallization of new professional groups[91] into new units, differences in tribal configurations of various regions, and historical specificities all generated fragmented identities whose number and morphologies are astounding but reflect centuries of historical development under the influence of brahmanical culture. Caste ideology provided an integrating mechanism that did not require uniformity or replication of the fourfold varṇa structure.[92]

This may be illustrated by a study of the Veḷḷāḷa caste. I have argued that owing to the changed perception of the functional role of the vaiśya and śūdra varṇas in the early centuries of the Christian era, the land-based agricultural communities of the south were placed in the śūdra varṇa and they stood next only to brāhmaṇas. This was due to the failure of the emergence of viable social groups to be identified as kṣatriyas and vaiśyas in the specific material conditions. By this time the brahmanical theory too had begun to measure the relative purity and rank of a community in terms of the myth of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages of the original founder couples. Hence, the Veḷḷāḷas who were landowners and tillers

of the soil and held offices pertaining to land were ranked as śūdras[93] but nevertheless became a status category at the regional or sub-regional level. This caste has a very wide geographical spread. It is pointed out[94] that land-based communities quite distinct from the Veḷḷāḷa have claimed Veḷḷāḷa status and in the course of time have gained acceptance and intermarried with older Veḷḷāḷar families. This is reminiscent of the formation of the Rajput caste in the north. Thus caste ideology could even transcend varṇa categories while retaining notions of hierarchy, endogamy and functional similarities to organize varied structural forms.

An exploitative system which has the capacity to enrol the best of whatever origin in its own service is far more pernicious and long lasting than one that is closed and static. Varṇa stratification received strong justification from the doctrine of *karma*, which was an invention of the elite[95] in later Vedic times and tried to explain the inequalities of the varṇa order from the view point of its own class position. The class role of caste ideology has not been camouflaged too well: it has been an instrument of power hierarchy; and field studies have shown[96] that a correlation between caste and class may be seen in a large measure even in modern times. This was even more true in pre-colonial times, when caste rules had the sanction and support of the ruling classes.[97] The religious cloaking of caste ideology begins with the justification of varṇa divisions in later Vedic texts, where it plays an important role in legitimizing the transition from tribe to state. The mechanism was perfected and proved very helpful to the indigenous ruling elite of later centuries — for cultural as well as politico-economic reasons. Brahmanical law-givers enjoined upon the ruler to ensure proper observance of caste duties, and inscriptional evidence shows that brahmanized rulers took pride in championing the *varṇa-dharma* and actively intervened in regulating caste hierarchy.[98] After all, it was a status system which could not be delinked from the question of power.[99] It has been argued[100] that political histories of local level chiefs in pre-colonial times vitally transformed caste structures of their region and the dichotomy of religion and politics is 'inappropriate at the level of ideological or cultural analysis in Indian social thought'. To the extent that this view seeks to emend earlier Indological interpretations of caste, which conceived it as a

static socio-cultural phenomenon ignoring the political and economic underpinnings, it may be seen as an important corrective. However, the recent attempt of Ronald Inden[101] to 'retheorize'[102] castes as 'subject-citizenries' constituting the territorial associations of *paura-jānapadas*, and as 'complex agents overlapping with one another and with royal courts' in an 'imperial formation' which 'reconstituted' or 'reproduced' itself, or more accurately, its ruling class 'as a self-ruling society' through the annual holding of the 'ceremonial bath' or *abhiṣeka* of the king,[103] the entire polity being 'constituted' or 'conducted in the language of the major religious orders',[104] is an astonishing exercise in obfuscation. In the name of restoring 'agency'[105] to Indian (read 'Hindu') people and to show that their 'rationality' was different from that of the Western mind it is argued that in the Indian context socio-economic categories of analysis, the problematic of inequitable structuring of castes and other social groups, the systems of production, distribution, etc., are irrelevant. What makes sense is that which is located firmly in the irrational: rituals, religious processions, discourses on the divine will, and so on. But the post-modernist jargon ill-conceals the neo-colonialist agenda which, as Shrimali has rightly pointed out,[106] is to resurrect James Mill's 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' periodization of Indian history by attributing the formation of 'castes' in something resembling their modern form to the collapse of Hindu 'kingship'.[107] Apparently Inden's argument is that during Muslim rule castes lost their so-called 'subject-citizenry' character and became autonomous and inward-looking, reduced to merely 'subjects', as the new rulers followed a different religion; but no attempt is made to show how dominant castes were made to lose their political or socio-economic privileges or rights of 'citizenship' with the changed religion of the ruler. By attributing the dynamics of social change to the advent of Muslim rulers on the scene, taking a static, unchanging view of the entire pre-fourteenth century Indian society, conflating *paura-jānapadas* as caste associations[108] and ignoring the question of menial castes and tribes, Inden seeks to emphasize the Hindu-Muslim divide rather than promote any logically consistent and scientific understanding of India's past.

However, India is a land of long continuities (which does not mean that it has been static). The history of caste shows that not only did it play an important role in the political economy of the day, but it has been modifying, changing and adapting itself to suit material conditions prevailing in the course of its long existence. The crucial question is raised by Irfan Habib:[109] who were its main beneficiaries? His answer is that no doubt brāhmaṇas would benefit to the extent that every priesthood benefits from the success of the religious system it upholds. But the main beneficiaries were the ruling classes as the system helped generate larger revenues from the countryside by reducing the cost of peasant subsistence. The repression of menial castes and securing their structured dependence[110] made agricultural labour cheap and it also reduced the cost of artisanal products and services; for artisan castes had a depressed status with restricted mobility; and hereditary transmission of skills reduced the expenses on training, etc., lowering the wage-cost as a whole. Hence, Habib points out, while differentiation in terms of caste was alien to Islamic law, Muslim rulers and writers never question the inequities of the caste system. Their criticism of Hinduism concentrates on its alleged polytheism and idol worship. 'So long as "petty production" remained the dominant form, the caste system retained its inestimable value for every regime', whether the rulers were situated within the caste society or outside it.[111]

Modern industry has replaced petty production which favoured craft-exclusiveness on a non-competitive basis. It has eroded the notions of caste hierarchy and untouchability, and the taboos on interdining at least in urban areas. But the prohibition of inter-caste marriages is still observed widely, for it is not in conflict with the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary, endogamy almost invariably means arranged marriages on considerations of wealth, power and status, and as such is well impregnated with the capitalist value system. As a matter of fact in some aspects the strength of the caste system has even increased in modern times; and caste ideology may well be undergoing further modifications. The patron-client nexus of the *jajmāni* type (service relationship) which existed in the traditional village community, is being increasingly replaced by the contractual, pecuniary and impersonal forms of exchange under the

influence of market forces, with the result that in times of adversity an individual has to depend all the more on the members of his own caste for group support. Present day politics too allow the elite of caste to exploit the caste-consciousness of their castemen in order to compete with the elite of other castes and communities for political power. Thus caste ideology has gained strength both for political and economic reasons, in spite of the fact that there are increasing differentiations of wealth and status of individuals within each caste. Inter-caste relations are now marked by cleavages and conflicts replacing the traditional ethos that gave the communities a sense of togetherness in the countryside. Thus caste ideology has become a material force impeding the growth of class consciousness.

NOTES

1 Andre Beteille, 'The Reproduction of Inequality: Occupation, Caste and Family', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (N.S.), Vol. 25 (1991), pp. 3-28, reprinted in K.L. Sharma, ed., *Social Inequality in India* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 115-47.
2 David F. Pocock, 'Difference in East Africa: A Study of Caste and Religion in Modern Indian Society', *South-Western Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 13 (1957), pp. 289-300.
3 Dipankar Gupta, 'Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 46 (17 November 1984), reprinted in idem, *Social Stratification* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 112f.
4 Ibid., p. 137.
5 Infra, Chap. 2, sec. i.
6 Ibid.
7 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Delhi, 1970).
8 Dipankar Gupta, op. cit., p. 131.
9 Steven Vertovec, 'Hinduism in Trinidad: The Transformation of Tradition in Trinidad' in Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, eds., *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Delhi, 1991), p. 169.
10 D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (London, 1965), p. 50; Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian* History (Shillong, 1985), p. 17.

11 D.D. Kosambi, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (henceforth *ISIH*) (Mumbai, 1956), p. 25.
12 Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History* (Delhi, 1995), p. 165.
13 Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History,* p. 17.
14 Infra, Chap. 2, sec. ii.
15 The disproportionate influence of Risley's theory on historical and sociological writings on caste (as well as on popular perceptions) has been largely due to the misreading of the Ārya/Dāsa-Dasyu and Aryan/Dravidian dichotomies in the Indological texts and their concordance with the *varṇasaṃkara* theory, which is the Dharmśāstric view of the origin of lower ranking 'mixed' castes. However, the view that the Dāsas constituted an earlier pre-Vedic wave of the Aryans seems now to be gaining ground in academic circles. See ibid., sec. i. For the Aryan/Dravidian issue, see Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in the Social Structure of the Early Tamils', in R.S. Sharma and V. Jha, eds., *Indian Society: Historical Probings (In Memory of D.D. Kosambi)* (Delhi, 1964), pp. 124-55.
16 *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 57-8.
17 Satya P. Sharma, 'A Materialist Thesis on the Origin and Continuity of the Caste System in South Asia', *The Eastern Anthropologist,* Vol. 36, No. 1 (January-March 1983), pp. 55-7; Dipankar Gupta, op. cit., p. 111; Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* (New Delhi, 1994), p. 32.
18 Morton Klass, op. cit., p. 175.
19 Distinguishing between tribe and caste, Max Weber wrote that a tribe, unless it has become a 'guest' or 'pariah people', usually has a fixed territory and practises exogamy at the level of the totem, the village, and the sibs. Endogamy exists only under certain conditions. Caste however does not have a fixed territory and endogamy forms the essential basis of a caste [*The Religion of India*, translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York, 1968), pp. 30-3].
20 N. Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam Between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries AD* (Delhi, 1991), Chap. 4; also see idem, 'Landholding and Peasantry in the Brahmaputra Valley, c. 5th-13th Centuries AD', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 33 (1990), pp. 157-68.
21 M. Klass, op. cit., p. 185.
22 The point is not rebutted by the example of ancient Sinhalese society which had caste without the presence of brāhmaṇas, and

few untouchables, except for the Rodis who were itinerant beggars and very small in number. It is held that the Sinhalese caste system is 'historically and conceptually related to the Indian' [Richard F. Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Delhi, revd. edn., 1991), p. 345]. The structuring of Sinhalese tribes into a caste system took place under Buddhist influence. Buddhism had no need for the ritual role of the brāhmaṇas and disclaimed the relevance of caste for the pursuit of salvation,even as it accepted caste as a fact of life. The Pali canonical literature shows upper class prejudices against low occupations and this is reflected in the Sinhalese system which is based on a hierarchy of occupations but not notions of ritual impurity of social groups.

23 E.R. Leach, ed., *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 10.

24 A.L. Kroeber in David L. Sill, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* (London, 1930), p. 254.

25 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', *IHR* VI (July 1979-January 1980), pp. 5-6.

26 Gail Omvedt, op. cit., pp. 34f.

27 For the *tinai* concept see K. Sivathamby, 'Early South Indian Society and Economy: The Tinai Concept', *Social Scientist*, No. 29 (1974), pp. 20-37; Rajan Gurukkal, 'Forms of Production and Forces of Change in Ancient Tamil Society', *Studies in History*, V, 2, n.s. (1989), pp. 164-5. I had a useful discussion with C.N. Subramaniam (of Ekalavya, Bhopal) on the subject.

28 George L. Hart III, *The Poems of the Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts* (Berkeley, 1975), pp. 119f.

29 Suvira Jaiswal, op. cit., pp. 45-8.

30 J.C. Heesterman, 'Vrātya and Sacrifice', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. VI (1962-3), pp. 11-15.

31 *Āpastamba Śrauta-sūtra*, X.13: 1-2; 15.5 quoted in ibid., p. 12; R.N. Dandekar, *Śrautakośa*, Vol. II, Pt I (Pune, 1973), p. 81.

32 Heesterman, op. cit., p. 12.

33 J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (The Hague, 1965), p. 326.

34 Ibid., p. 322.

35 *Āpastamba Śrauta-sūtra*, X.11.5-15 quoted in *Śrautakośa*, II, i, p. 80.

36 See Fredrick M. Smith, 'Indra's Curse, Varuṇa's Noose, and the Suppression of Women in the Vedic Śrauta Ritual' in Julia Leslie, ed., *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women* (Delhi, 1992),

pp. 17- 45. For the use of sacrifice as an occasion for defining gender-based relationships see Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India: Eighth to Fourth Centuries B.C. as Reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition* (Delhi, 1994), p. 67.

37 For example, the Koch Rajbangshis. This point was made by Vasanthi Raman. See Vaskar Nandy and Vasanthi Raman, 'The Long Transition: The Case of the Koch-Rajbangshis of North-Eastern India', paper presented at the Seminar on 'From Tribe to Caste', Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 8-12 November 1993.

38 S. Jaiswal, 'Stratification...', pp. 29f; Irawati Karve, 'Kinship Terminology and Usages in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda', Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* (hereafter *ABORI*), XX (1938-9), pp. 219f; Kumkum Roy, op. cit., pp. 246-7.

39 *ṚV*, X. 86.10.

40 *Vedhā ṛtasya vīriṇī*, ibid.

41 *ṚV*, II. 32.7.

42 *ṚV*, VII. 1.6.

43 *ṚV*, II. 17.7. Compare this with *AV*, I. 14.3 where such a maiden is called the *kulapā* of the *rājan* (or Yama?). *ṚV*, X. 179.2 speaks of *kulapās*, heads of families, attending upon the chief (*vājapati*).

44 *ṚV*, VIII. 31.8.

45 For example, IV. 5.5.

46 Hanns-Peter Schmidt, *Some Women's Rites and Rights in the Veda* (Pune, 1986), pp. 30-75.

47 Irawati Karve, 'Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usage in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*', *ABORI*, XX (1938-9), pp. 109-44; idem, 'The Kinship Usages and the Family Organization in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*', *ABORI*, XX (1938-9), pp. 213-14; idem, 'Kinship Terms and the Family Organization as found in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata', Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, V (1943-4), pp. 61-148.

48 Idem, *ABORI*, XX (1938-9), pp. 216f. Also see Sarva Daman Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 19, 39f.

49 Karve is aware that the stories of Yama-Yami and the Sun-god's incest with his daughter may have other meanings and may not be literal evidence for the prevalence of marriage between siblings or promiscuity. But she says [*Kinship Organization in India* (Bombay, 3rd edn., p. 32)] that not all references can be dismissed in this manner. For example, *ṚV*, X. 162.5, which is an incantation to drive away the demon causing abortion goes as follows: 'He who sleeps with you becoming your brother, husband or lover and who kills your progeny, him I destroy.' Apparently here the demon

is supposed to take the form of a person to whom the woman would be sexually accessible, the husband, lover or brother! Griffith excludes this hymn from his English translation, providing a Latin translation in the Appendix.

50 S.V. Karandikar, *Hindu Exogamy* (Mumbai, 1928).

51 Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, pp. 51f.

52 G.S. Ghurye, *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charaṇa* (Mumbai, 1972), pp. 293f.

53 Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (London, 1973), p. 303.

54 John Brough, *The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Mañjarī of Puruṣottama Paṇḍita with an Introduction* (Cambridge, 1953).

55 Genda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1986).

56 *AV*, XI.8.1.

57 S. Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History...', p. 14, fn. 4.

58 *ṚV*, IX.92.6; X.97.6. Also see I.40.8, and X.42.10.

59 *ṚV*, X.90.12; *AV*, XIX.6.6.

60 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XII. 7.3.8.

61 Ibid., IV. 3.3.15; see Jogiraj Basu, *India of the Age of the Brāhmaṇas* (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 115-19.

62 It is interesting that the term *kṣatra*/kṣatriya is derived from the root *kṣi*, which also has the sense of 'dwelling' and 'movement' (Monier-Williams, *SED*, s.v. *kṣi*, *Nighaṇṭu*, II.14, *Nirukta*, II.4; II.21). Thus *kṣaya* meaning 'dwelling' or abode and *kṣiti* meaning 'habitation' are also derived from the same root which also has the sense of 'to move, go'. Apparently at one time dwellings or habitations were mobile, and those who protected them were known as *kṣatra*. The task of protection was associated with 'power', 'might' and 'governance'. For a movable dwelling see the *AV*, IX. 32.4 which says 'Like a bride O dwelling, we carry thee where we desire' (*vadhūmiva tvā śāle yatrakāmaṃ bharāmasi).*

63 R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi, 3rd edn., 1991), pp. 178-9.

64 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIV.4.2.27, also II. 1.4.4.

65 Arrian, VI.16; Diodorus, XVIII, CII quoted by K.P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity* (Bangalore, 4th edn., 1968), pp. 65-6; Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. II, quoted by Jayaswal, p. 66.

66 Jogiraj Basu, op. cit., p. 37; Suvira Jaiswal, 'Caste in the Socio-Economic Framework of Early India', Presidential Address, Section I, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 38th Session (December 1977), pp. 32, 34-6. Also see R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras in*

Ancient India (Delhi, 2nd edn., 1980), pp. 69-70.

67 S. Jaiswal, 'Studies ...', *IHR*, VI, Nos. 1-2 (1979-80), pp. 9-13.

68 Claude Meillassoux, 'Are There Caste in India?' *Economy and Society*, Vol. II (1973), pp. 92-3.

69 *Nirukta*, XII. 13.

70 *Śūdrāṇām aniravasitānām*, *Pā.*, II. 4.10.

71 *Mahābhāṣya*, edited by Keilhorn (Bombay Sanskrit Series, Mumbai, 1892), Vol. I, p. 475.

72 The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* speaks of the gods belonging to the brahma, kṣatra, vaiśya and śūdra varṇas, I.4.11-15, R.E. Hume, tr., *Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads* (Delhi, 2nd edn., 1969), pp. 84-5.

73 *Manusmṛti*, X.20-3. For the existence of four varṇas among trees and the animal world see C.G. Kashikar, ed., *Śrautakośa*, Vol. I, Pt II (Pune, 1962), p. 1156.

74 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Varṇa Ideology and Social Change', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4 (March-April 1991), pp. 41-8; idem, 'Studies ...', Section IV, pp. 70f.

75 Dipankar Gupta, 'From Varṇa to Jāti: The Indian Caste System from the Asiatic to the Feudal Mode of Production', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. X (1980), pp. 249-71.

76 P.V. Kane mentions some brāhmaṇa castes named after the Vedic śākhās studied by their ancestors, such as Kāṇvas, Maitrāyaṇīyas, Carakas, etc., *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Pt II, p. 976. Gonda relies on D. Bhattacharya in *Fundamental Themes of the Atharvaveda* (Pune, 1968), p. 39, for the statement that the brāhmaṇas of the other Vedas do not practice commensality or connubium with the Atharvanic brāhmaṇas (Paippalādins) of Orissa; J. Gonda, *Vedic Literature: A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1975), p. 267. For a hierarchical arrangement of brāhmaṇa lineages named after land measures, such as Bīs Biswā (lineage with 20 measures of land) and Solah Biswā (lineage with 16 measures of land) among the Kānyakubja brāhmaṇas, see R.S. Khare, 'The Kanyakubja Brahmans and Their Caste Organization', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 16 (1960), pp. 348-67.

77 For brāhmaṇas see B.P. Mazumdar, *Socio-Economic History of Northern India (from A.D. 1030 to 1194)* (Calcutta, 1960), p. 81. For vaiśyas, K.C. Jain, *Malawa Through the Ages (From the Earliest Time to 1305 A.D.)* (Delhi, 1972), p. 485.

78 J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India (in the British Museum)* (London, 1936), pp. cxviiif, 164.

79 *Majjhima Nikāya* (edited by Mahāpaṇḍita Rāhula Sankrityayana

and P.V. Bapat, 3 vols, Nalanda Devanagari Pali Series, 1958), Vol. II, p. 447.

80 *Kāśikāvivaraṇa-pañjikā* (edited by Srish C. Chakravarti), Vol. II, p. 343 quoted by B.P. Mazumdar, 'Polity of the Andhaka-Vṛṣṇi Sangha', *Dr Satkari Mookerji Felicitation Volume* (The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, Vol. LXIX, Varanasi, 1969), p. 207.

81 Ibid.

82 T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, eds., *Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I (London, 1890), p. 97; Narendra Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Mumbai, 1966), pp. 102-3. Compare this with the statement in the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (XIV.6.6) that Vatsa, the son of sage Kaṇva from a śūdra wife, proved to be better brāhmaṇa than his other son Medhātithi. For a useful discussion of the early Buddhist attitude to caste see Richard F. Gombrich, op. cit., pp. 354-8.

83 Triśalā, the sister of the Licchavi rājā Ceṭaka had married the *jñātrika* rājā Siddhārtha, father of the Jaina Tīrthaṅkara Mahāvīra. Ceṭaka's daughter Chelanā had married the kṣatriya king Bimbisāra of Magadha. According to the *Mahāvastu* the Koliyan and Licchavi princes had competed with prince Siddhārtha (the Buddha) for the hand of the Śākyan princess Yaśodharā. A careful scrutiny of the terms relating to kinship and marriage in the early Pali sources leads Wagle to conclude that 'endogamy and commensality, the two fundamental characteristics of modern caste', were absent. He further writes that marriage 'with a non- *ñati* that is, one outside the "extended kin-group" was permissible outside the caste' especially when it took place between the high varṇa-categories. Thus marriage between *khattiya* and brāhmaṇa meets no strong disapproval, unlike the marriage of a brāhmaṇa with a *dāsī* which was strongly disapproved. N. Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha*, pp. 132-3.

84 *Manusmṛti*, X.43-4 speaks of kṣatriya-*jātis* in plural.

85 K.S. Singh, *People of India: An Introduction* (Calcutta, 1992), pp. 24f.

86 R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes in Early Medieval India (circa A.D. 500-1200)*, First Devraj Chanana Memorial Lecture (Delhi, 1969).

87 Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 82-93.

88 Ibid., p. 85.

89 S. Nagaraju, 'Emergence of Regional Identity and Beginnings of Vernacular Literature: A Case Study of Telugu', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 23, Nos. 10-12 (October-December 1995), pp. 8-23.

90 Nagaraju argues that Jaina and Śaiva orders at least ideologically 'did not subscribe' to the varṇa-*jāti* hierarchical structure and hence had 'an easy and mutually beneficial interaction with the new social class'. Even if these religious sects were more open than the Vedic orthodoxy, the Jaina records of the ninth and tenth centuries from Karnataka in fact show strong caste prejudices. The *Ādi Purāṇa* of Pampa attributes the creation of the four varṇas to *tīrthaṅkara* Ādinātha and his *cakravartī* son Bharata, and describes Ādinātha as forbidding the mixing of castes (*varṇasaṃkara*). K.L. Narasimha Sastri, ed. and tr., *Ādi Purāṇa of Pampa* (Bangalore, 1980), VIII. 64 and XV.6-12 quoted in U. Malini Bhat, 'Religion and Society in Southern Karnataka in the Early Medieval Period', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, 1996), p. 327. The Aṅkanāthapura memorial of Camakkabbegal describes her and her two sons as supporters of the *cāturvarṇa* and the Śravaṇa Saṃgha, and the *Cāvuṇḍarāya Purāṇa* explicitly denies artisans and other low-caste groups the right to be initiated in the Jaina ritual vow of *sanyasana*. S. Settar, *Pursuing Death: Philosophy and Practice of the Voluntary Termination of Life* (Dharwad, 1990), p. 251. The Lakṣmeśvara inscription of the reign of Vikramāditya VI (AD 1081) describes a distinguished pious Jaina family of Dinakara, Rajumayya and Dūḍama, and speaks of Dinakara as 'the sun in the sky of the brāhmaṇa race'. Dūḍama too is a 'scion of worthy brāhmaṇas' (*EI*, XVI, p. 9). It was correct observance of caste rules and not adherence to a belief system which was crucial to individual identity. Even husband and wife could be followers of different religious faiths depending on their individual inclination,without creating discord or contradictions. Thus, for example, the inscriptions of the Noḷamba ruler Mahendrādhirāja, who lived in the last quarter of the ninth century, describe him as a staunch Śaiva who built the temple of Mahendreśvara at Baragur (*Epigraphia Carnatica*, XII, old edn., Si. 38), but his queens Bijaya Mahādevī, Parama Mahādevī, Akkabbe and Domabbe, were Jainas and patronized the Jaina *basadis* (*EC*, XII, old edn., Si 24 of *c.* AD 880). Similarly Cālukya Mahāsāmanta Durga (tenth century) was a Śaiva, and his wife Piṭṭabbe a Jaina. A.M. Shah writes that in Gujarat a Vania caste may have both Hindu and Jaina members without restrictions on intermarriage, and frequently husband and wife have different religious affiliations (*Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 1-39, reprinted in K.L. Sharma, ed., *Social Inequality in India*, Jaipur, 1995, p. 225, n. 6).

91 For example, the caste of scribes known as Kāyasthas.

92 Richard G. Fox, 'Varṇa Schemes and Ideological Integration in Indian Society', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. XI (1969), pp. 27-45.

93 Gita Dharmapal-Frick, 'Shifting Categories in the Discourse on Caste: Some Historical Observations' in Vasudha Dalmia and H. von Stietencron, eds., *Representing Hinduism* (New Delhi, 1995), pp. 82-100, refers to a Tamil poem, *Ererubadu,* cited by Ziegenbalg, a seventeenth-century Pietist-Lutheran missionary based in the Danish enclave of Tranquebar. Thẹ poem is in praise of the plough and places the śūdra Veḷḷāḷa on a pedestal even higher than the brāhmaṇa. She quotes: 'Even being born a Brahmin does not by far endow one with the same excellence as when one is born into a Veḷḷāḷa family.' Such high praise reminds us of the panegyrist of Singaya Nāyaka of Akkalapuṇḍi grant, who claimed that the śūdra varṇa to which his patron belonged was higher than the other three varṇas, as it came out of the feet of Viṣṇu along with the holy river Gangā. This only goes to substantiate my contention that, at least in the south and in Bengal, the śūdra stood next only to the brāhmaṇa and was not a degraded status as was the case in the Gangetic valley, the cradle of the fourfold varṇa system. It is for this reason that Ziegenbalg's writing gives the impression that the śūdras represented the 'genuine mass of Tamil society', which latter category would of course, have excluded the outcastes or *avarṇas.* The scheme of social gradation followed in the *Aparājita-pṛcchā*, a twelfth century work on architecture composed in Gujarat, sticks to the conventional enumeration of varṇas in descending order. What is more significant, however, is the fact that śūdras are placed above *karṣakas* and *prakṛtis*, interpreted as dependent peasants and serving castes of craftsmen respectively. B.N.S. Yadava, Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, 53rd Session (Warangal, 1993), p. 17, fn. 1. Perhaps the compilation of Census Reports in colonial times made the people of these areas more conscious of the pejorative meaning of the term 'śūdra'. Infra, Chap. 2, secs. iii, iv.

94 S. Arasaratnam, 'Social History of a Dominant Caste Society: The veḷḷāḷar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 18th Century', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3 and 4 (July-December 1981), pp. 377-91. Also see E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Chennai, 1909), Vol. VII, p. 376.

95 The doctrine of *karma* is propounded for the first time in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III.2), which tells us that those who

please the gods by good conduct are reborn into the three higher varṇas but those whose conduct is evil enter into a foul and stinking womb, such as that of a bitch, a pig or an outcaste (V.10.7-8). For the origin of this doctrine in the elite circles of the later Vedic age, see A.L. Basham, *The Origin and Development of Classical Hinduism*, edited and annotated by Kenneth G. Zysk (Delhi, 1990), Chap. 3.

96 K.L. Sharma, 'Stresses in Caste, Stratification: A Study of Six Villages in Rajasthan', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4(3), 1969.

97 Infra. Also see R.S. Sharma, 'Varṇa in Relation to Law and Politics'; idem, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Chap. XVI.

98 The Śaka rulers Rudradāman and Uṣavadāta were great patrons of brāhmaṇas. For the claims of a number of kings to have regulated the order of castes see ibid., pp. 234-5. Kulke points out that Somadatta, who ruled in north Orissa in the first quarter of the seventh century under the overlordship of king Saśāṅka of Bengal, explicitly states in his Midnapur inscription that he followed the laws of Manu; Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi, eds., *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi, 1978), p. 127, fn. 5.

99 For a critique of Dumont's view which separates ritual status from power by interpreting *brahma* as denoting the former and *kṣatra* as denoting the latter category, see Suvira Jaiswal, 'Varṇa Ideology...', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4, p. 44; idem, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History', *IHR*, VI, pp. 3-7.

100 Nicholas Dirks, 'The Original Caste: Power, History and Hierarchy in South Asia', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Occasional Papers, Vol. V (1990), pp. 59-77.

101 Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990).

102 Ibid., p. 227.

103 Ibid., p. 229.

104 Ibid., p. 268.

105 For an excellent critique of Ronald Inden's work see Aijaz Ahmad, 'Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India', *Studies in History*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January-June 1991), pp. 152f. Ahmad remarks, 'only the mindless have ever asserted that kings and dominant castes lacked "agency", in the sense of capacity to act purposefully to change their own circumstances, or that the Indian was constitutionally irrational' (ibid., p. 160).

106 K.M. Shrimali, 'Reflections on Recent Perceptions of Early Medieval India', Presidential Address, Section IV, Andhra Pradesh History

Congress, XVIII, Annual Session (8-9 January 1994), p. 8.

107 R. Inden, op. cit., p. 82, is wrong in assuming that castes became autonomous structures on the decline of Hindu kingship. Long before the advent of Muslims on the scene Manu advised the ruler to respect the laws of castes (*Manusmṛti*, VII.203; VIII.41), which were already autonomous decision-making groups. For colonial interventions undermining the traditional autonomous jurisdiction of caste groups over their own affairs and their resistance to this process see Kanakalatha Mukund, 'Caste Conflict in South India in Early Colonial Port Cities: 1650-1800', *Studies in History*, Vol. XI, No. 1, n.s. (1995), pp. 1-20.

108 On the character and function of *paura-jānapada* assemblies, R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 82.

109 Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History*, p. 19.

110 Infra, Chap. 2, sec. ii.

111 Even for the earlier period there is little evidence to show that the Śaka and Kuṣāṇa rulers, 'the heretical śūdra kings' of brahmanical perception, fraternized with low-caste śūdra slaves and hired labourers owing to their non-commitment to varṇa ideology, as R.S. Sharma suggests (*Śūdras in Ancient India*, p. 235). On the contrary their quick absorption of varṇa ideology is well attested. See n. 98 of this chapter. The fact that some of them patronized Buddhism does not prove their antipathy to the varṇa system. The Buddhist texts of the early centuries of the Christian era, such as, the *Milindapanho* and the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa, are imbued with varṇa ideology. Incidentally, the author of the *Vajrasūcī* seems to have been different from the author of the *Buddhacarita*, and later in date. He appears to have belonged to eastern India. Whereas the *Buddhacarita* accepts the norms of the varṇa system, the *Vajrasūcī* criticizes it. At any rate, although ideologically Buddhism was opposed to caste hierarchy and as such could have had special appeal to those who were its victims, in practice varṇa/caste prejudice is evident even in the early Pāli canon. The main thrust of passages dealing with the question of caste in these texts is to prove the superiority of the kṣatriyas over the brāhmaṇas. In Sri Lanka where caste structuring took place under Buddhist inspiration we are told that it was the lawful activity of the king of Kandy 'to ordain appropriate function to various castes: he could also degrade certain villages or families of high caste to a lower status ...', Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organization: The Kāṇḍyan Period* (Colombo, 1956), p. 180, quoted in Richard F. Gombrich, op. cit., p. 349.

2

Caste and Gender: Historiography

THE TRADITIONAL INDIAN SOCIETY has been studied by a large number of scholars coming from various disciplines and professions, such as Indologists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, students of Indian religions, not to mention reformers and politicians; and the beginnings of these studies are traced as far back as the eighteenth century. The multitudinous literature produced on the subject makes any attempt at a comprehensive bibliographical survey a Herculean task and may not be worth the labour required. Even so the contribution of scholarship in the field of ancient Indian history, the small fraction as it is on the sociological historical aspects of caste, can be neglected only at peril, given the convergence of all studies. A few historiographical articles and trend reports on various aspects of social history have appeared[1] in recent years examining the approaches and assumptions of earlier scholars and their social and intellectual moorings, and these serve as useful guides for an understanding of the scientific value as well as the limitations of various researches conducted under different ideological perspectives. The present study is an attempt to add to and supplement work in this direction by focusing attention on the manner in which certain fundamental problems of early Indian social history have been or may be handled. There is greater focus on north India, as a survey of work on the social history of early Tamils has been published elsewhere.[2]

I

Since the most obvious feature of Hindu society was its division into castes, the pioneering studies of missionaries, colonial administrators-turned-historians and ethnographers not merely

recorded their field-observations, but also tried to explain the origin of this system by identifying what they considered to be its essential contributory element or elements.[3] Thus, according to Nesfield,[4] hereditary specialization of occupation was at the root of the caste system; guilds had petrified into castes in a hierarchical order, and the more primitive and ancient an occupation, the lower was its ranking. Risley,[5] on the other hand, regarded caste chiefly as an aspect of race, and he claimed that the caste status had a simple correlation with the nasal index of its members. Senart on his part emphasized the occupational factor in the origin of caste, but his main contribution lay in the fact that he clearly distinguished between varṇa and *jāti*, identifying castes with the latter and interpreting the former as 'class'. The institutions of *jāti* and varṇa were for Senart in essence independent of each other, but later became incorporated. The *jātis* were grafted on the varṇas by the brāhmaṇas to maintain their superiority, but the varṇa scheme never corresponded to reality, and the origin of the *jātis* should be traced to Indo-European kin groupings corresponding to the Roman *gens*. Senart's attempt to relate caste to the kinship system of the Indo-Europeans came in for much criticism at the hands of the later sociologists, but his arguments regarding the fictitious reality of the varṇa have been carried further by some scholars.

Another early theoretician of the Indian caste system was Celestine Bougle,[6] who asserted that the four varṇa system had never been more than an ideal; the real groups were *jātis* or castes which, in his view, formed part of a system based on three fundamental principles—hereditary specialization, hierarchy and repulsion or isolation of one group from another. The three principles are found interrelated as a system in India only; hence, the institution of caste is unique to India. Bougle's definition emphasizes simultaneity of the three characteristics and he criticized the eighteenth-century 'artificialist' error which saw the caste system as the result of premeditation of the priests, a voluntary creation, and remarked that we must not 'exaggerate the power of religion over Hindu Civilization' and we must study the economic life 'if we wish to discover the forces which elaborated the skeleton of Hindu organism'.[7] He however pointed out that the hierarchy of caste was determined less by the

usefulness or difficult nature of occupations than by their relative purity and impurity.[8] The idea that the concept of purity and pollution, and not racial difference, was at the root of caste exclusiveness was further stressed by Ketkar.[9] Earlier Ibbetson,[10] while recognizing the role of guilds and of religious exploitation by the brāhmaṇas, had laid great emphasis on the tribal origins of castes. Hutton at the end of his review[11] of existing theories of caste remarked that although most of these theories had made a contribution to the subject, they generally emphasized the phenomena 'rather than the causes of the caste system and hardly anyone with the exception of Sarat Chandra Roy has given due importance to the role of primitive conceptions of taboo, *mana* and soul-stuff in the formation of the caste system'.[12] Hutton himself lists roughly more than fifteen 'more obvious factors' contributing to the 'emergence and development of the caste system', such as ecological isolation, magical beliefs about certain crafts, primitive ideas regarding 'the power of food to transmit qualities', tribal concepts of taboo, *mana*, soul-stuff, totemism, pollution, ceremonial purity, belief in the doctrine of *karma*, clash of races and colour prejudice, and deliberate exploitation by a hierarchy.[13]

Hutton was the last of the administrator scholars, and his concept of caste has come in for severe criticism at the hands of leading social anthropologists after the Second World War.[14] It is contended that in trying to define caste with reference to a number of cultural-behavioural traits and isolating its essential characteristics, Hutton overlooks the fact that caste is primarily a system of interrelated groups in which differences in the distribution of economic and political power are expressed through a cultural language such as restrictions on commensality and connubium. For Pocock, Hutton's work is based on nineteenth-century evolutionism and ethnography and is an 'amorphous dossier of facts',[15] lacking in any guiding theory. Dumont criticizes Hutton for taking an 'atomistic' view of caste and neglecting to study the system as a whole (not however in any empirical sense of the term but in an ideological sense), for according to Dumont, 'caste is above all a system of ideas and values'.[16] One may not agree with Hutton's critics in blaming

him for his failure to create a theory of caste by giving primacy to just one factor, ideological or empirical, as his study shows very well that caste is not a sudden, artificial creation but an organism which evolved gradually through a multiplicity of factors. Even though Hutton regards the caste system as 'a composite unit of many individual cells, each functioning independently' and as such unduly minimizes the importance of those socio-economic and cultural bonds which sustain the system making it an organic whole, his study remains a classic investigation into the origin, nature and function of caste.

Later sociologists have shifted the focus from a search into origins which they regard as 'speculative' to synchronic studies of caste based on field work. However, in recent years Louis Dumont has re-emphasized the need of interdependence between Indology and social anthropology[17] and although in the preface to the French edition of his monumental work on caste, *Homo Hierarchicus*, he clearly states that he has 'not set out to provide a history of the caste system', he frequently uses historical data to prove his point and makes a number of assertions regarding the origin and nature of the caste system, which are problems of fundamental interest to a historian of ancient India. As such, unless it is kept in mind that the main aim of Dumont is to build a model of caste with (ritual) hierarchy as its central idea in order to contrast it with the Western world-view supposedly based on 'egalitarian' values—and to this end he has subordinated all other aspects of the system no matter how important these may have been in its formation and functioning—Dumont's interpretation of the evidence derived from ancient Indian history may be quite misleading to one who wishes to reconstruct and interpret that past. At a time when there is growing awareness of the need for interdisciplinary approach to historical problems, it is important to bear in mind the limitations and differences between the methodology of history and sociology and social anthropology. E.J. Hobsbawm points out that the models and analytical frameworks of sociologists and social anthropologists 'have been developed systematically and most profitably by abstracting from historical change' and these are of no use 'for the study of long-run historical socio-economic transformations'.[18]

If we accept the view that 'history in its essence is change, movement',[19] then such analytical abstractions or models may be interesting scholastic exercises but are of little use in providing us an understanding of the historical reality of social formations.

Beginning with the initial assumption that 'ideology is central with respect to social reality as a whole', Dumont tries to interpret the reality of the caste system as deriving from the concept of hierarchy which he defines as 'the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole'.[20] Thus, for him caste is an organization of hierarchical relationships, and he describes it as a structure in which the interdependence of the elements contained within it is so great that the system cannot exist without this interdependence. In this way the basic unity of the whole is emphasized against the 'atomistic' conception of caste, and it is sought to be proved that the hierarchical society is anti-individualistic as it is a non-competitive ranking system which does not permit individual initiative in the interest of the unity of a higher order. Since hierarchy is a religious principle based on the opposition of the pure and the impure and this is supposed to lie at the base of the caste system, it is not surprising that Dumont is led to conclude that from a dialectical point of view the hierarchical model of Indian society over the ages represents stagnation. The hierarchy absorbs or rather 'encompasses' all contradictions or 'complementarities' within it; hence, 'there can be no development in dialectical terms, for what the dialectical movement should produce was already there from the outset, and everything is forever contained within it'.[21] This inexorably logical framework neatly denies the need to look for significant changes in class contradictions in the development of Indian history over a vast stretch of time (post-Vedic times to the present day), for 'the castes are still present, and untouchability still effective', and the technico-economic changes have not brought about a change in the overall framework.

Criticizing the observation of Marx that the growth of the railway system and modern industry would dissolve the system based on a hereditary division of labour, Dumont writes that 'caste society has managed to digest

what was thought must make it burst asunder'.[22] Dumont's explanation is that in modern India changes are confined to the politico-economic spheres which are 'both insulated from and contained within the system of values'.[23] The system of values has not changed apparently. From the traditional perspective social and economic developments are secondary; they do not govern the rest of social life. Hence, caste retains its essence by 'encompassing' the politico-economic domain in 'an overall religious setting'. Interestingly, Dumont accepts the assessment of G.S. Ghurye and E.K. Gough[24] that caste no longer determines occupation, caste inhibitions regarding food and drink are very much on the decline and the notions of purity/impurity and hierarchy of castes have weakened considerably in recent times. Yet he does not draw the logical inference from these trends that the institution, by his definition basically a system of relationships rooted in the concept of purity and pollution, is in the process of dissolution. Since endogamy is the main bond now holding a caste together, Dumont maintains that the 'structural' character of caste is becoming 'substantialized' but its fundamental character, its religious basis, remains intact 'even when there is a weakening of the opposition between pure and impure'.[25]

Modern sociologists are studying changes in the economic and political roles of caste under the capitalist mode of production, and are generally of the view that the latter has transformed caste from a non-competitive ranking system to a system of social stratification in which group-consciousness of each caste is utilized and fostered by its elite to vie with other elite groups for maximum economic and political gains, but have perhaps not given adequate attention to the reasons for the survival of endogamy which is mainly responsible for the continuance of caste divisions. It is not generally realized that the traditional caste system not only sanctions the subordination and exploitation of lower castes by the higher, but also of women in general who are to be 'given away' in a manner which would enforce caste relationships. After all, those aspects of caste which are not in conflict with the capitalist social formation need not change under its impact, and caste endogamy is quite in harmony

with capitalist notions of private property. Only free participation of women in social production on an equal footing with men can create the conditions for greater freedom of sexes without the traditional restraints of caste; and the institution can disappear completely. A deeper probe into this aspect of caste would reveal that endogamy persists not because of the irrational persistence of certain religious values but because of the continuing socio-economic subordination of women which keeps them dependent and segregated and enforces a system of arranged marriages contracted through traditional channels. Among the progressive urban elite where women choose to follow independent professional careers, inter-caste marriages are not uncommon, and these are not leading to the formation of new castes as conceived in the *varṇasaṃkara* theory of the Dharmaśāstras but only to the dissolution of caste in certain circles.[26]

But the phenomenon of the continuation of caste can hardly be explained by Louis Dumont owing to the limitations of his initial assumptions. For him 'it is something to know that hierarchy is a universal necessity, it will become manifest in some way, in covert, ignominious or pathological forms in relation to the opposed ideals in force'.[27] By way of example Dumont refers to the (bourgeois) democracy of the United States where the abolition of slavery was followed by the emergence of racism, a reassertion of the principle of hierarchy. It is impossible for Dumont to conceive of a genuinely egalitarian, classless society. And since the West has failed miserably in eliminating inequality in spite of its professed faith in moral and political egalitarianism, the Indian variety of hierarchy is to be viewed with much more sympathy and understanding. A certain amount of idealization of caste is evident. Gerald D. Berreman's description[28] of Dumont's theory as 'the brahmanical view of caste' is singularly apt. One may compare it with the opinion of Pandurang Vaman Kane, who chastized the critics of caste with the remark that they have not pointed out 'what social organization is to be substituted in its place and how'. Kane thought that most critics of caste had 'the Western social system based on wealth and the industrial revolution', that is the capitalist social formation, in view, and warned that 'that social system also is as evil as or

perhaps worse than the modern caste system'.[29]

Not rarely, the objective fact of the continuity of the varṇa system over a long period of time and the traditional acceptance of the high status of brāhmaṇas is regarded as proof of the soundness of the system; thus P.A. Sorokin argues that the varṇa system would not have existed for nearly two thousand years if it did not have a satisfactory 'social distribution' of individuals.[30] Again such appreciative estimates are based on a view of caste as static and attaches excessive importance to the continuation of its religious aspect. It ignores historical changes in the nature and functioning of the system as a whole as well as in its constituent elements in the course of its long history.

Nirmal Kumar Bose[31] sought to explain the strength of the caste system from a different point of view. According to him, caste was basically a non-competitive system of production which safeguarded monopolistic hereditary rights[32] to occupation. This is surely only a partial explanation, which does not look upon the system in its totality. No doubt the system assured the monopoly of occupation to those who had specialized skills acquired through heredity. It may be even argued that caste provided a sense of security to its members. Very often lower castes observe caste rules with greater vehemence than the upper castes. But apart from the factors of insecurity and exploitation lending greater cohesiveness, two more factors should be taken into account. First, the integration of lower castes into society at large is minimal; in most cases they retain a strong sense of solidarity, exclusiveness and taboos inherited from a tribal past. Second, there is a tendency to imitate upper caste notions of purity/pollution to elevate their status. This may be at the root of the fact that untouchables in Uttar Pradesh regard the washerman as untouchable. Since the untouchables hardly require the services of a washerman, their attitude cannot be explained as a tribal relic. However, when we take an overall view of the caste system, there is no doubt that its essential function has been to ensure the supply of handicrafts and agricultural labour, a non-specialized task, to upper castes by making upward mobility practically impossible for the menial castes.

II

We have examined the major sociological theories of caste in order to note their contribution to and extent of influence on historical studies of the post-independence period. We need not confuse 'the ideological or political motivation of research or its utilization, with its scientific value',[33] although an awareness of a scholar's frame of reference certainly gives a better understanding of a continuing debate. It is well known that Risley was an imperialist and was influenced in his formulations by the practice of racial segregation prevailing in the USA and South Africa.[34] But the theory of racial origin was accepted with some modifications by a number of scholars like R.P. Chanda,[35] N.K. Dutt,[36] D.N. Majumdar[37] and G.S. Ghurye,[38] whose writings otherwise reflect the sentiments of nationalism and social reform. Most of these scholars explained the origin of the caste system in terms of the conquest of Aryans over Dravidians and of Dravidians over pre-Dravidians, and their views continue to be cited in recent publications.[39] The theory of racial origin implied a conscious effort on the part of the Aryan conquerors to keep their blood unsullied by aboriginal contamination; Ghurye emphasized the role of the brāhmaṇas in developing the caste system for maintaining such purity. According to him, Risley's anthropometric tests showing correspondence between the social ranking of a caste and nasal index of its members was broadly valid for northern India. This was questioned by other scholars who pointed out that an equally valid and perhaps even better case could be made for differentiating Indian physical types on the basis of region rather than caste.[40] After a detailed anthropometric survey of the population of UP in 1941, D.N. Majumdar came to the conclusion[41] that the population was largely homogeneous and it was not possible to deny that the caste system with the brāhmaṇas at its apex was completely devoid of racial significance. The tribal groups had not contributed to the formation of the caste system as such, although one could notice that the proportion of aboriginal blood in castes (the extent of their 'hybridization') had an inverse relationship to their position in the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, attempts at identifying specific varṇas

or castes with particular races or 'intermixture of certain races' in a given region may still be detected in a few scholarly writings.[42] The interpretation of caste in terms of Aryan-Dravidian opposition became very popular in the context of south Indian politics where it was seen as a clever device of the brāhmaṇas for imposing their racial superiority.[43]

In recent years there has been an increased awareness of the need to define and clarify the concepts used for interpreting India's past. Thus Trautmann[44] criticized those who confused varṇa with 'caste' or 'class' and remarked that varṇa is a sacred concept which is better understood with reference to 'estate' in medieval European thought than in terms of 'class' which is 'too objective, scientific and modern to represent adequately the notion of varṇa'. The varṇas are a divine creation and immutable, but castes may fuse together or split into smaller castes; new castes may also be enrolled. Thus the relation of varṇa to caste is that of 'sacred and enduring to the empirical and ephemeral'. Hence varṇa should be translated as 'order' or 'estate' and not 'caste' or 'class'. This controversy is not new. As we have seen, Senart was the first to distinguish between varṇa and caste and Hutton endorsed the distinction. Max Weber[45] stressed that varṇa was 'status group' or 'estate' and not 'class' with its economic referents. Even so, Weber freely used the word 'caste' for varṇa, apparently influenced by the writings of early Indologists; the practice continues to this day as nearly all the standard text books of ancient Indian history beginning with the *Cambridge History of India* (Vol. I), to the *Comprehensive History of India* (Vol. II), make no distinction between varṇa and caste. Sociologists point out that the studies of ancient Indian culture and society have largely projected a 'book-view' based on Sanskrit texts and this has led to the conclusion that the modern multiplicity of castes has grown out of the fourfold varṇa division of society in Vedic times. They[46] are of the view that the varṇa concept is inadequate to explain the fact of castes as these exist today in various regions of India, and they have drawn attention to differences between varṇa and *jāti*; the latter is shown to operate at the local level, but the varṇa model remains the same all over India. Further, theoretically the varṇas are divided on the basis of their functions, but the *jāti* hierarchy is organized on the principle of the absolute

purity of the brāhmaṇa caste and the relative impurity of all other castes.

There is no doubt that in modern times a distinction between the *jāti* and the varṇa is easily perceptible as varṇas are broad categories subsuming within them a large number of *jātis* in a rather loose fashion. None the less, in spite of Trautmann's assertion[47] that Sanskrit literature scrupulously observes a distinction between the two words, detailed studies of the early uses of the terms lead to a very different conclusion.

In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini the term varṇa is used twice for groups mentioned in later law-books as *jātis* or mixed castes and the term *jāti* is applied to the brāhmaṇa varṇa.[48] In the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira both varṇa and *jāti* are used to denote the fourfold division of castes.[49] P.V. Kane has shown[50] that although the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* makes a distinction between varṇa and *jāti* in two passages, often the two are confounded and the term varṇa is applied to the so-called 'mixed castes' which were evidently *jātis* or endogamous craft-exclusive groups closely corresponding to the modern usage of the term. Wagle,[51] in his comprehensive analysis of the kinship and stratification terminology in the early Buddhist texts, comes to the conclusion that *jāti* was a concept which ascribed status to birth; hence the texts speak of excellent *jātis* and low *jātis*. Occasionally, *jāti* is applied to the varṇa divisions also, but is generally used for well-demarcated, exclusive social groups of tribal origin such as the Cāṇḍāla *jāti*, the Veṇa *jāti*, the Niṣāda *jāti*, the Pukkusa *jāti*, the Śākya *jāti*, the Licchavi *jāti*, and so on. To me this evidence strongly suggests that the assimilation of tribal groups into the Indo-Aryan social organization popularized the use of the word *jāti* in the sense of caste.[52] It is asserted that not a single *anuloma* or *pratiloma jāti* bearing a tribal name can be located within the region of Āryāvarta as described by Manu. Further, there is a statement of Baudhāyana that the mixed castes lived outside Āryāvarta in the countries of Avantī, Aṅga, Magadha, Surāṣṭra, Dakṣināpatha, Upabhṛt, Sindhu and Sauvīra, that is 'in the belt surrounding Āryāvarta'.[53] We may add that since the division of labour envisaged in the varṇa organization emphasized the principle of heredity from its very inception,[54] varṇa could also

signify *jāti* and the two terms could be used interchangeably. The indiscriminate use of the two in popular usage is reflected in the name of a village known as *Bṛhatchattivaṇṇa* (a village inhabited by thirty-six varṇas) mentioned in a tenth-century copper plate inscription from Bengal.[55] The basic identity of the concepts of varṇa and *jāti* in the perception of participants indicates that varṇa and *jāti* did not constitute two different systems but one,[56] and it is well known that Hindus themselves even today apply the term *jāti* to all the levels of the caste system beginning with varṇa to what is described by the sociologists as the'subcaste'.[57]

Thus it is obvious that the occurrence of the term *jāti* in post-Vedic brahmanical and Buddhist literature need not necessarily mean that a caste system based on values and practices other than those inherent in the varṇa system was already operating a few centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. Some scholars, faced by the bewildering complexity of the caste system in modern times, prefer to attribute it to the Indian ethos, than study the material, historical process which may have led to its origin and growth. Thus Irawati Karve remarks that untouchability is a characteristic of the caste structure from top to bottom[58] and that the system goes back to Harappa culture in which the *jāti* specializing in pounding grain lived in a cell-like isolation, which fact was misinterpreted by archaeologists as evidence of slavery.[59] Speaking as the President of the Ancient India section of the Indian History Congress in 1969, Romila Thapar expressed the view[60] that varṇas represented the theoretical and *jāti* the functional aspect of caste, the former was an attempt to explain the existing reality which in its essentials ought to be traced to Harappa culture. These essentials were defined as first, the existence of hereditary groups governing marriage relations; second, a hierarchical division of labour based on service relationships which later came to be known as the *jajmāni* system;[61] and third, the idea of ritual purity and impurity of social groups. In Thapar's view the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro clearly indicated observance of an 'ablution ritual which was probably central to the notion of ritual purity'.[62]

This thesis had earlier been developed by S.C. Malik who

described caste as the 'Indian style of life', already evolved before the coming of the Aryans, in Harappan society.[63] The advent of the Aryans only brought about organizational changes in Indian society; the basic structure, that is, the fundamental aspects of the Harappan socio-economic institutions, remained intact. These bold assertions were made on the basis of the settlement pattern of the Harappan cities which undoubtedly indicated the existence of class differences and separate localization of well-to-do classes, rulers and workmen. However, we may point out that this is not unique to the Harappa culture. As Gideon Sjoberg remarks,[64] segregation along ethnic and/or occupational lines is a common feature of the pre-industrial cities of Asia as well as Europe, and even though the hypothesis[65] that the ruling 'elite' of Harappa combined in itself religious and political authority may be plausible, it does not mean that a hierarchy of endogamous divisions which had evolved a system of economic interdependence had already come into existence. Malik tries to prove that although the large cities of the Indus valley disappeared, the Harappan peasant-urban system with its specific settlement pattern reflecting occupational and social differentiation survived and was adopted by the Aryans, and the second phase of urbanization in the Gangetic valley shows 'clear resemblance to the basic planned pattern of the older Harappan urban areas'.[66] This view is convincingly refuted by A. Ghosh,[67] who demonstrates that no Harappan feature can be detected in the early cities of the Ganga basin.

Just as it is unhistorical to explain the origin of numerous castes through the uncritical acceptance of the classical theory which regards them as the product of confusion of the four primary varṇas,[68] so it is wrong to foist on an ancient past a phenomenon observed in modern times without working out intermediate stages or seeking alternative explanations. The study of contemporary data is undoubtedly useful in understanding the function of ancient tools, rituals or customs, items whose documentation has been traced to a historical epoch with a reasonable amount of certainty, but *a priori* assumptions derived solely from the situation obtaining today may even prove to be a handicap to our correct understanding of the past since there is

an inherent danger of reading too much of the present into the unspecified past. Whether certain developments go back to one thousand or three thousand years or to the static Harappan or dynamic Aryan culture can be determined only on the basis of available evidence, archaeological or literary, without which any generalization degenerates into speculation and falls into the fallacy of *petitio principii*.

The transposition of the *jajmāni* system or 'service relationships' into the Harappa period ignores the most significant aspect of the system, the relationship of the *jajmāna*, the central figure of the system, with land. The entire nexus of *jajmāni* relationships in a village community as described by Wiser[69] is built not around the priest but around the landowner or agriculturist who need not be of the highest ritual status. As Oscar Lewis in his foreword to Wiser's book remarked[70] with a great deal of perception, 'landownership is clearly the single most important determinant of power in the *jajmāni* system'. In my opinion, the later *jajmāni*[71] system utilized the concept of ritual ranking to restrict the mobility of dependent people, but it cannot be seen as the survival of a culture in which the priesthood is supposed to have occupied the apex position by virtue of his inherent sacred powers.

Again, to hold that *jāti* represents the functional and varṇa the theoretical aspect of caste is a statement which lacks conceptual clarity and supportive evidence. As Wagle has shown,[72] in the early Pali literature *jāti* is not used to emphasize bonds of kinship but to indicate status position. A more logical distinction between the two terms is attemtped by Dumont who argues that the underlying principles of varṇa and *jāti* are different—the varṇa hierarchy is based on function but the *jāti* emphasizes the relative purity/impurity of castes. From this point of view, both terms have theoretical as well as practical or functional dimensions. However, it may well be that the notion of purity/impurity described as characteristic of the *jāti* system was in fact an elaboration of varṇa ideology in the face of a deterioration and hardening of class relations.

While the possibility of the survival of some elements of Harappa culture is strongly advocated by some archaeologists,[73]

it is stretched too far by those who assert that the advent of the Aryans meant only organizational (and not structural) change in 'the Indian style' which has had an uninterrupted existence from the days of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Such a view derives from the concept of a static Indian society presumed to be incapable of any fundamental change. Whatever changes did take place, according to this view, were extrinsic, leading at the most to a reorganization. An assumption of this kind attributes to ideology instead of material factors the role of determinant in the formation of a social structure. Dumont's study of caste also rests on this premise, but he has shown a better appreciation of the historical evidence by regarding the system of ranking endogamous groups hierarchically on the principle of purity/pollution as a post-Vedic development.[74]

However, Malik quotes extensively in support of his view from D.D. Kosambi, who propounded the theory that the brāhmaṇa caste was formed with the fusion of Harappan and Aryan priestly elements. Kosambi also held that the beginnings of the caste system should be traced to the formation of a servile caste from the Dāsas, 'the descendants of Indus settlers who had provided the surplus for Indus cities, being persuaded thereto by some method other than force, say religion'.[75] It is not clear whether by 'religion' Kosambi meant the concept of purity/pollution of hereditary social groups. Nevertheless, we may point out that the Dāsas became servile after their conquest by the Aryans; there is nothing to show that they had a servile status in an earlier culture. In several Ṛgvedic passages they are described as owning considerable wealth and in some *dānastutis* some Dāsa chiefs are praised for their liberal gifts to brāhmaṇas. As argued elsewhere,[76] the caste ideology was not static and the concept of purity/impurity of social groups developed in historical times with the intensification of class exploitation. It is a mistake to look upon caste ideology as a constant despite changes in social context.

Kosambi was a pioneer whose insights, provided a general hypothesis for the study of caste within the framework of historical materialism. He does speak of caste as not something which had had a continuous existence from the time of Harappa

culture but as a new social organization which grew in the Gangetic basin under totally 'different techniques of production' than those of the Harappa culture.[77] He traced the origin of caste endogamy to the assimilation of the Aryans and the pre-Aryans in one civil society,[78] and regarded 'the introduction of new relations of production, on a scale vast enough to make substantial difference of quality', the chief contribution of the Aryans.[79] According to him, the formation of a servile caste from the defeated Dāsa and Śūdra tribes led to the development of new relations of production in Aryan society. This was the origin of 'the older northern caste system', evidently varṇa, from within the tribe.[80] But in peninsular India caste-cum-class developed under external stimulus owing to the confrontation and assimilation of the materially and technologically superior Aryans and the aborigines of varied cultural levels and territories. Caste and occupational rules became rigid only in the stagnant Indian villages with the emergence of feudalism.[81] It is obvious that as far as Kosambi is concerned, the later *jāti* system is a further development of the older caste/class system which assimilated new tribal and professional groups and adjusted them to existing relations of production. At one place he expresses regret over the fact that most books on the caste system 'neglect changing productive relations, the influence of tribal contact and endogamy, formation of guilds from tribal fractions and castes from both'.[82]

Kosambi asserted that a social formation based on the slave mode of production in the classical European sense never existed in India at any period[83] and the role of chattel slavery was negligible.[84] Marxist historians in India generally endorse the view that slavery did not constitute the main basis of production at any stage, although Devraj Chanana[85] and R.S. Sharma[86] have shown that slaves were employed in large number in the production process in certain regions of India in post-Vedic and Mauryan times. However, it is remarked that the major question concerning slavery is not the numerical importance of slaves, but 'how slavery functioned in the transformation from communal to class society'.[87] The role of slavery in introducing economic differentiations in an egalitarian society was clearly recognized by Kosambi. He regarded the assignment by the tribal authority

of 'one or more *dāsas* to labour for a particular sub-group' of the Aryan tribe as an important contributory factor to the growth of economic disparity and rise of private property of certain sub-groups or family groups.[88] For him this marked the beginning of the original caste/class system. The decline of tribal egalitarianism and differentiation within the tribe paved the way for a class society wider than the tribe in which, despite continuing tribal influences, 'the priests and warrior castes united to repress and exploit the Aryan peasant (*vaiśya*) and non-Aryan helot (*śūdra*)'.[89]

The problem of class formation in Indian society has particularly attracted the attention of R.S. Sharma, who is of the view[90] that Ṛgvedic society was ranked; but as it was a pastoral society, it could not develop class differentiation in the absence of a surplus. Some warrior and priestly families employed slave labour—mostly of women captured in war—in heavy domestic work; and women of the inimical Dāsa tribes were also captured to meet the shortage of women in the conquering tribes. But slavery of this type could only give prestige and comfort to some high ranking persons; it could not provide the base for a social class of exploiters. This conception of Ṛgvedic society may provide a better explanation of the evidence on Dāsas and Dāsīs in the early Vedic passages than looking on these captives as serfs.[91] Slave labour could be useful economically only if it could produce surplus beyond the cost of its own maintenance. But this was not possible in the nomadic pastoral conditions. Hence, whereas women of the Dāsa tribes were taken to restore the balance of population, their children did not suffer from any disabilities and could be fully integrated into the lineage and attain the ranks of priests or warriors. It is possible to explain the rise to eminence of persons of Dāsa origins such as Balbūtha Tarukṣa, Kavaṣa Ailūṣa, Mahīdāsa, Divodāsa and Kakṣivant Auśija on this basis. To explain it in terms of hypergamy or the flexibility of the caste system[92] is to mistake the nature of Ṛgvedic society.

Sharma argues that even later Vedic society was not a full-fledged class society.[93] Although the four varṇas had emerged and the first two varṇas lived off the exploitation of peasantry (vaiśya varṇa) and servile labour (śūdra varṇa), separate socio-economic classes, in the sense that some owned the means of

production and others were completely deprived of these, had not come into existence. Sharma characterizes later Vedic society as a 'small-scale non-monetary peasant society' in which there was unequal distribution of the produce of land but which nevertheless retained prominent tribal characteristics. It was only with the greater utilization of iron for crafts and agriculture around 500 BC in eastern UP and Bihar that larger surpluses became available, and this provided the material foundation for the emergence and stabilization of class society and its instrument, the state. Sharma suggests that the social structure in mid-India from the sixth century BC to the fifth century AD may be called 'vaiśya-śūdra based society in the sense that vaiśyas were peasants and śūdras were artisans, slaves and hired labourers'. From about the fifth century significant changes begin to appear in the nature and relationship of social classes and these usher in a feudal social formation.[94]

Thus R.S. Sharma has explored the panorama of early Indian social history with a thoroughness which combines a clear theoretical perspective with a deep study of sources. If his frame of reference has stimulated controversy, he has persistently directed attention towards meaningful problems and exhorted historians to avoid the temptations of fashionable phraseology and model building.[95] He does not hesitate to borrow conceptual tools from other disciplines provided they help in revealing the possible pattern of social structure under study and indicate the dynamics of its social production and distribution. In his recent studies of Vedic society he derives help from social anthropology on the structure and functioning of tribal communities, and the combined method enables him to conclude that in Ṛgvedic society redistribution of food was made through kin-based units. He also suggests the correspondence of certain Ṛgvedic social units with social-anthropological categories of tribe, lineage and segment. Such a methodology needs to be pursued, for generally historical studies have used such terms as tribe, clan, etc., rather indiscriminately without attention to the inner structure of the societies discussed.

Perhaps the first serious attempt to use the sociological terms with scientific precision was made by Narendra Wagle, who

applied[96] the phrase 'extended kin group' to the Licchavis, Mallas, Śākyas and other kinship groups mentioned in the early Pali texts. Wagle pointed out that society at that time had an extensive division of labour and hence was not tribal. The use of the terminology derived from tribal organization, therefore, was misleading for the age of the Buddha. Wagle shows a great deal of originality in using the techniques of modern sociology for analysing the data from early Pali texts. His painstaking study of the forms of address and greeting used by persons of different groups reinforces and lends greater accuracy to our knowledge of the '*de facto* social groups' existing at the time. However, his analysis of inter-personal relationships in the social, religious and political spheres fails to bring out their congruence with the system of economic relations, with the result that whereas he speaks of the 'threefold system of ranking' (social, political and religious), he ignores the evidence on wider socio-economic classes in a post-tribal society. In the Pali texts these appear to be well marked and polarized, as indicated by the regular clubbing together of the *vessa-suddas*, peoples engaged in the task of production. But, as Wagle follows the analytical model of Radcliffe-Brown, who analyses structure by abstracting it 'from any changes that it may be undergoing', his work becomes more 'a backward projection of sociology' than social history; the latter can ill afford to ignore the process of change and social tensions generated by change.

Earlier, a few studies of the Buddhist sources did attempt to emphasize the influence of economic factors on contemporary social relations, but owing to the early stage of historical knowledge in this area, these suffered as much from the problems of textual chronology, etc., as from vague generalizations.[97] Although A.N. Bose published his two-volume *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India (c.600 B.C. to A.D. 200)* in the crucial years of the independence struggle, he boldly ridiculed the 'pet patriotic' notion of a supra-mundane Indian culture and drew attention to hard material facts at the root of Indian civilization.[98] In his opinion the brahmanical social philosophy provided only a veneer of 'external harmony' while class interests based on the production and distribution of wealth remained

'essentially hostile'.[99] Another Marxist scholar, B.N. Dutt,[100] at about the same time discussed the class character of social and political institutions from the Ṛgvedic age to the end of the early medieval period. His writings are marked more by his 'enthusiasm' than the 'scientific method', but served to challenge certain sedulously cherished myths of nationalist historiography such as the prevalence of social harmony in the early periods of Indian history and the use of governmental organization for the well-being and prosperity of all classes.

It is only in the late sixties or so that efforts began to study changes in the social order in the context of the mode of production, and an outline has emerged. The researches[101] of B.N.S. Yadava have not only corroborated the views of R.S. Sharma but have also extended our knowledge on significant aspects of the problem. He has drawn[102] attention to certain technological and economic changes, which expanded the scope for individual enterprise in the field of agriculture in the early centuries of the Christian era and which obviated the need for a Mauryan type of state control. These changes provided the economic foundation for the emergence of a rural aristocracy, which was a new phenomenon. The process was further accelerated by the entry of a large number of Śaka and Kuṣāṇa foreign hordes, who established themselves as a ruling class over a considerable part of northern and western India. It is further argued that economic change together with the presence of large, politically dominant foreign groups and the activities of heretical sects, such as Buddhism and Jainism, created a crisis in the established order and led to the loosening of control over the śūdras, and their transformation into sharecroppers and a class of dependent peasantry on the one hand and greater exploitation and decline in the status of the free peasantry represented by the vaiśyas on the other. The feudal tendencies of the Kuṣaṇa period became more and more pronounced in later centuries with the grant of land and villages to religious and secular beneficiaries and the abandonment of fiscal, administrative and judicial rights by the state over the donated area. The process led to the division of the soil among the greatest possible number of sub-feudatories or intermediaries. Indian

feudalism reached its climax in the eleventh-twelfth centuries over a major part of the subcontinent; after that a decline set in for a number of economic and political reasons.

The characterization of the early medieval period as 'feudal' has been challenged not only by those[103] who are accustomed to look on early Indian society as unique and changeless but also by those who identify feudalism with serfdom and regard it as specific to Western Europe.[104] We need not repeat the arguments in favour of adopting the comparative historical method for building a model through a study of the relationship of the direct producers with the owners of the means of production to reveal the hidden basis of social structures, which may have infinite variations and gradations in appearance but none the less show fundamental similarities. The chief merit of this exercise lies in the fact that it underscores the universal laws of social change underneath the specificities of individual cultures. The methodology is adopted unhesitatingly for the study of prehistoric societies,[105] and there is no reason for abandoning it once we reach the historic phase. It may be argued that not all the links in the chain of arguments advanced in favour of Indian feudalism are equally strong; the concept needs to be strengthened both theoretically as well as in detail.[106] None the less, the use of the feudal model has made a significant contribution towards the study of the agrarian class structure by focusing on the changes in the nature of the class of exploiters and the peasantry and the methods of surplus expropriation.

It is argued[107] with some force that the use of the term 'dependent peasantry' in the Indian context is wrong, for 'dependence' means 'diversion of at least part of peasant's labour from his own process of production to that of the lord', in other words, forced labour; but although the evidence cited by Sharma and Yadava shows increasing exploitation of the peasantry, it does not prove its subjection to forced labour for agricultural production. In our view this is a very narrow interpretation of dependence. Discussing 'labour rent', Marx remarks that in all forms 'in which the direct labourer remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and labour conditions necessary for the production of his own means of subsistence', the property

relationship must simultaneously appear as 'a direct relationship of lordship and servitude', that is, of dependence; and 'the direct producer is not free; a lack of freedom which may be reduced from serfdom with enforced labour to a mere tributary relationship'.[108] Apparently, R.S. Sharma has used the term dependent or 'subject' peasantry in the sense that the peasantry was coerced to part with the surplus through extra-economic compulsion; and the mechanism of exploitation was direct and clearly perceptible to the peasant. Sharma argues that in heavily populated areas the rights of the peasantry were deeply eroded through the undercutting of communal rights to forests, pastures, water-reservoirs, etc.; the practice of subinfeudation and the threat of forcible eviction further reduced them to the position of tenants-at-will. But serfdom seems to have prevailed in backward tribal areas where there was a scarcity of labour. Yadava goes further and says[109] that the number of dependent peasants must have exceeded that of free peasants in the early Middle Ages. He includes sharecroppers and agricultural labourers in his definition of the dependent peasantry and concludes that the most common form of dependent peasantry was that of the sharecroppers.[110]

In the absence of statistical data it is difficult to form an exact conception of the major form of landholding at a given time; and the problem of the uneven development of different regions makes such generalizations even more hazardous. However, in my opinion, the general absence of forced labour in the agricultural sector in the old caste dominated areas may be explained not in terms of the lack of interest on the part of feudal landlords to organize the cultivation of large landholdings directly, but with reference to the *structured dependence* of the group of untouchables and other menial castes whose number increased considerably from early medieval times. They could not become independent farmers but were often employed as sharecroppers and formed an essential ingredient of the land system which required a dependent labour force. The correlation of caste with landlessness and various types of servitude has been adequately demonstrated in the case of the major regions of the south; and it is shown[111] that the pattern goes back to pre-British times. It is

possible to work out a similar correlation between the hierarchy of agrarian structure and the hierarchy of caste for the other regions of India too; and the process may be traced to early medieval times. It is significant that an early medieval text, the *Parāśarasmṛti*, speaks[112] of the *ardhasīrins* and the *ārdhikas* as a mixed caste belonging to the śūdra varṇa, and these terms denote sharecroppers in the contemporary inscriptions.[113] This text further tells us that a brāhmaṇa, along with the performance of the *ṣaṭkarmas* (six traditional acts), may also have agricultural work done and should see that his bullocks which are yoked to the plough are not thirsty, hungry, tired or sick. However, a brāhmaṇa who is himself engaged in agricultural operations commits a great sin (*mahādoṣa*).[114] It is in this context that the widespread practice of establishing brāhmaṇa *agrahāras* and the grant of land to individual scholars for the pursuit of Vedic studies and other religious activities becomes intelligible.

Researches into the nature of class contradictions prevailing in early Indian society are still in their infancy; and, generally speaking, the concept of social history seen in the books dealing with 'society' or 'social conditions' is that of 'residual history' covering a variety of human activities such as dress, manners or customs, with politics and economics left out. Social differentiation is examined in the framework of varṇas. This is partly due to the nature of our literary sources which provide sociological data in the framework of varṇa, but it is also partly due to the general assumption that class contradictions did not develop in a varṇa-divided society[115] based on a harmonious division of labour which emphasized cooperation and not competition. Thus, in overlooking the class character of caste, excessive emphasis was laid on its ritual aspect, which became the main point of reference. Even the questions of social mobility were largely viewed as matters of internal adjustment of ambitious groups of individuals within a static varṇa system that allowed limited mobility without loss of equilibrium;[116] and Romila Thapar remarks that social mobility 'in Indian society did not necessarily mean a change in the actual status of a caste but perhaps more often the attempt to improve the ritual status or else to deny its importance.'[117]

To ignore the class role of caste and to interpret it mainly as a

matter of endogamy and ritual ranking[118] often amounts to its defence and idealization. One more step in the same direction is to trace its rigidity and evil aspects to some external communal factors. It is often held that the varṇa system became rigid due to 'Muslim' invasions, for Hinduism tried to protect its culture from the onslaught of Islam by laying stress on the purity of birth and blood.[119] However, deeper analysis of the socio-economic roots of caste may reveal that the caste system becomes rigid in settled conditions when caste and class coincide; but in times of crisis, when class hegemony is threatened, class differentiation begins to cut across and into caste formations and the process of fusion and fission of castes is accelerated. The fear expressed in the Purāṇas over confusion of the varṇa-*dharma* as a result of foreign invasions reflects a concern for the maintenance of a *status quo* threatened by change in the ruling class and the consequent possibility of new social groups acquiring power and prosperity. It is curious that whereas much is made of the allusions in the brahmanical texts to the confusion created by the Turkish invasions to *varṇāśramadharma*, similar statements regarding native rulers are quietly ignored.[120] War conditions, whether caused by internecine warfare or the invasion of the Turkish rulers, must have created upheavals in the established order, but if the Muslims were indeed viewed as the 'common enemy' and a threat to 'Indian independence', the natural reaction of the brahmanical society would have been to unite rather than intensify the segregation of communities. Clearly the problem of rigidity/mobility needs to be explained with reference to socio-economic developments and not simply as communal responses to situations needing ritual adjustment.

Notwithstanding the analytical limitations indicated above, much useful information is now available on the various aspects of early Indian society from a considerable body of literature. Some studies concentrate on a specific time bracket,[121] some are regional studies[122] and some have taken up a particular type of source material (Buddhist, Jain) or a branch of brahmanical sources.[123] A growing trend which has perhaps yielded the largest number of monographs and still has potential for micro-level research is to take up a particular text or texts of one author and

to discuss the sociological data contained therein.[124] The merits of such books differ widely, and although most of them run the risk of drawing a rather static picture of the society in question, they have brought to light many useful details which help to build a base for deeper analyses.

III

As brahmanical religious literature comprises a major part of our source material, it is not surprising that our most detailed picture is of the brāhmaṇa varṇa. Most studies follow the general pattern of information found in the Dharmaśāstras discussing the duties and privileges of the brāhmaṇas, the occupations open to them, their ideology and social and religious customs. Occasionally, attempts are also made to collate this information with other contemporary literary and epigraphic records. None the less, we still lack studies analysing elements of change and continuity in each of these spheres against the background of socio-economic changes. Recently Romila Thapar[125] has applied the formulations of Marcel Mauss on gift-exchange to the ritual of making *dāna* and *dakṣiṇā* to brāhmaṇas with remarkable results. She argues that in the tribal and predominantly pastoral society of the Ṛgvedic period *dāna* and *daksiṇā* did not serve merely magico-religious functions but were also the means of exchanging and redistributing wealth and of conferring status on donor and recipient. With the transition from a pastoral to agricultural economy and from gift exchange to a market system the purpose of gift and gift items registered a corresponding change. Gifts of land took precedence over all other items in an expanding agrarian economy, and *dāna* ceased to be form of gift exchange. The full implications of this change in the self-perception of the brāhmaṇas and their role in society need to be examined.

According to the Dharmaśāstras the ideal livelihood for brāhmaṇas comprised receiving gifts (*pratigraha*), teaching the Veda (*adhyāpana*) and sacrifice for others (*yajana*). In later Vedic times these appear to have been the main sources of their subsistence because of the large-scale performance of Vedic sacrifices. It is not surprising that with the decline in the

popularity of Vedic sacrifices brāhmaṇas should be seen in increasingly secular professions. What is baffling,[126] however, is the fact that in early medieval times those brāhmaṇas who made a living out of priesthood by accepting gifts and performing sacrifices for the multitudes (*gaṇas*) or villages (*grāmayājakāḥ*) that is, for ordinary folk and the śūdras, were degraded,[127] while no stigma attached to those who accepted high administrative or military posts, which fell in the sphere of activities traditionally meant for kṣatriyas and were open to brāhmaṇas only in times of distress. The texts openly recommend the appointment of brāhmaṇas of high birth to such positions.[128] The situation corresponds closely to modern field observations[129] which reveal that everywhere in India brāhmaṇas who accept gifts (*pratigraha*) at places of pilgrimage or receive payment for officiating as priests (*purohitas*),or function as temple-priests (*pujārīs*, *devalakas* of the Smṛtis), have a status inferior to those who hold powerful secular offices. The traditional explanation that the 'selling' of priestly duties and the acceptance of gifts indiscriminately have downgraded them, indirectly highlights the fact that a section of brāhmaṇas was able to live off the rent received from land donated by the nobility; this land became its patrimony, obviating dependence on regular *pratigraha* and ritual service. Thus, for example, the Paragaon plates[130] of Pṛthivīdeva II of the Kaḷacuri dynasty dated AD1146 record the grant of a village to a brāhmaṇa named Padmanābha and praise him not only for his unparalleled Vedic scholarship but also for *apratigraha* or non-acceptance of gifts. The very term which earlier defined the appropriate livelihood for a brāhmaṇa was now stigmatized. The contempt for brāhmaṇas who 'peddled' or 'commercialized' their priestly services[131] was an extension of the contempt of the upper classes for physical labour. The material basis for this was provided by the acquisition of superior rights in land by brāhmaṇas as a reward for their learning or participation in administration and by the establishment of the *agrahāras* for Śrotriya brāhmaṇas, as may be seen in the Śasana villages of the Vedic brāhmaṇas of Orissa.[132]

The data from Orissa further helps us to understand the seeming contradiction in the brahmanical religious literature which extols

the gift of land to brāhmaṇas but regards the brāhmaṇas engaged in agricultural operations (*kṛṣikarma*) as degraded. We learn[133] that a large subdivision of Oriya brāhmaṇas known as Balarāma-goṣṭhī are settled in areas which must have been the 'tribal frontier' in earlier times. These brāhmaṇas played a pioneering role in changing the political economy of the region by introducing plough-cultivation in place of the tribal slash-and-burn; and this produced the necessary surplus for the rise of regional kingdoms in subsequent centuries. Nevertheless, these 'plough-priests', who worship the plough, are ritually inferior to Śāsana brāhmaṇas, who would not touch the plough and who represent a later wave of immigrants. The latter played a significant part in strengthening the politico-administrative structure of the regional kingdoms and their high status coincided with their access to politico-administrative power and control over economic resources. A significant point made by Kulke and his colleagues[134] in their study of the regional history of Orissa is that landgrants to brāhmaṇas during the 'heyday of political feudalism' between 1000 and 1200 did not in themselves initiate the process of feudalization of the state apparatus; rather these were meant to curb the power of feudal forces[135] both in court circles and in the peripheral regions[136] by providing the central power with 'a group of not yet feudalized administrative and ideological specialists'. From this point of view, the creation of a brāhmaṇa elite in Orissa through land grants was in response to the political expressions of feudalism and it was naturally based on the feudal modes of expropriating surplus; but the emergence of a feudal social formation there need not be traced directly to the practice of making land grants to brāhmaṇas. From the standpoint of social stratification, land grants to brāhmaṇas had important consequences. The practice involved them with agriculture and brought them in close contact with the tribal, śūdra or untouchable labour, and many might not have been able to avoid physical labour completely owing to demographic and economic factors. Such brāhmaṇas then stood degraded in the eyes of the Vedic or Śrotriya brāhmaṇas who also enjoyed income from land but, being closer to the political power in the nuclear region, became active participants in politics and

administration and established their claims to ritual superiority.

On the basis of field work in Madhya Pradesh it is argued in a recent study[137]that not only do the main subdivisions of the brāhmaṇa varṇa have a territorial origin[138] but also each brāhmaṇa subcaste region has settled within it one numerically dominant brāhmaṇa subcaste, apparently of indigenous origin, and one or more small immigrant brāhmaṇa subcaste groups; in terms of power and wealth the latter are often stronger and more influential. On the basis of this study, we may suggest that in the initial stages Aryanization chiefly meant the spread of varṇa ideology and the technology associated with it, and there may not have been extensive physical migration of the people from Madhyadeśa. Hence, brāhmaṇas were known by the name of their country, and broad territorial subdivisions emerged on this basis. Later, in early medieval times when indigenous chieftains, in the so-called absence of local 'pure' brāhmaṇas, began to send for brāhmaṇas from elsewhere to earn religious merit (in reality to create a class of loyal intermediaries and ideologues), the process of subcaste formation within the brāhmaṇa varṇa received a fillip. Immigrant brāhmaṇas generally retained a distinct identity and in some rare cases continued to have links with the parent group, but in most cases loss of contact with the original home and interaction with the local culture transformed them into new brāhmaṇa subcastes, such as the Kanyakubja or Gauḍa sections of Bengali brāhmaṇas. Sectarian, ritualistic and occupational differences contributed further to create a very complex picture of the caste organization. The result was that later myths about the origin of brāhmaṇa and non-brāhmaṇa castes rarely refer to the *puruṣasūkta* myth and are not concerned with the origin of the varṇa as a whole but only with a subdivision, caste or subcaste of a particular varṇa category.[139]

Weber held that social differentiations within the brāhmaṇa varṇa arose from the fact that many tribes, when transformed into castes, retained their tribal priests for traditional ritual services, and these came to be recognized as degraded brāhmaṇas.[140] The temple-priests were also degraded for the same reason. To some extent this may explain condemnation of the *gaṇayājakas* by the law books, obviously written by the Vedic,

Śrotriya brāhmaṇas. Legends such as the one regarding certain Kaivarta families being raised to brāhmaṇa status by Paraśurāma to act as the priests of Kaivartas[141] may be interpreted in this light. But this would be applicable to the priests of only such tribal castes as had improved their socio-economic status through participation in the production process but had not acquired a sufficiently superior position in the contemporary politico-economic power structure. We may cite historical instances to show that, when linked with groups which had acquired politico-economic dominance, tribal priests could even gain recognition as high ranking Śrotriya brāhmaṇas. Inscriptions of the Eastern Cālukyas speak of a number of Boyā brāhmaṇa donees belonging to different schools of the Vedas.[142] Boyas are a prominent non-brāhmaṇa community inhabiting the Nellore-Guntur region of Andhra Pradesh and are identified with the Bedars of the Kanarese regions.[143] However, in early medieval times some Boya chiefs seemed to have become a significant political force[144] and a few of their priests could even rise to the status of Vedic brāhmaṇas. The fact that there are no Boyā brāhmaṇas today need not mean that these priestly groups were 'de-brahmanized'[145] later. It is quite likely that in course of time traces of Boyā origin were erased and they were fully assimilated among the high ranking brāhmaṇas. It is a well known historical phenomenon that when a tribe is assimilated by caste society, some leading families find entry into the higher castes of brāhmaṇas, Rajputs or kṣatriyas as the case may be, but the majority not sharing in the politico-administrative or economic privileges continues to retain its separate identity and is reduced to the śūdra status.[146] The Niṣāda-*gotra* mentioned in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini suggests similar absorption of some Niṣāda priests to brāhmaṇa ranks.[147] Perhaps Kadamba Mayūraśarman, the brāhmaṇa who entered the *ghaṭikā* of Kāñcī for mastering the totality of the Vedas but later exchanged the 'sacrificial ladle for the sword'[148] and became a feudatory of the Pallavas, also had a tribal antecedent.[149] His successors assumed the title of 'Varman' proclaiming their kṣatriya status. The point I wish to make is that it was not the purity of blood or tribal origin which was the crucial determinant in the ascription of low rank to brāhmaṇas earning their living (*vṛtti*)

through the performance of priestly duties, but differential access to economic and political power. It derived from those cultural values which were sustained by the acquisition of superior rights in land by a section of the brāhmaṇas and their close collaboration with the ruling classes.[150]

Recently an attempt has been made to study the inner tensions and distinctions of rank developing within the brāhmaṇa varṇa as a result of economic competition for patronage.[151] This marks an advance over studies which treat the category as an undifferentiated whole. However, as pointed out elsewhere,[152] varṇa categories were actual compact identities in small-scale societies of later Vedic times, and differentiations grew within each of the four varṇas as brāhmanical society expanded. The process of hierarchical gradation within each varṇa cannot be explained simply in terms of ethnic accretions, even though such expansion has been continuous in Indian history. It was largely due to the unequal accessibility of political and economic power that hierarchical status distinctions crystallized. Weber was right in his view that the brāhmaṇas had never been a tribe; the synthesis of a number of priestly families developed into a hierocratic caste of cultured men.[153] Hence, hypergamy would be quite normal in the initial stages of the formation of the caste system and even later when a tribe assimilated into caste society and its priest was recognized as a brāhmaṇa. This appears to be at the basis of the strange phenomenon that in the theory of mixed castes of the law books, the purest and the highest varṇa appears 'in a sense the most lax of the twice-born strata'.[154] The tribal 'brāhmaṇa' could continue receiving wives from 'śūdra' tribesmen, since the majority of the tribesmen would be reduced to śūdra status.

Frequently newly emerged dynasties would 'find a respectable source'[155] of kṣatriya ranking by linking themselves to a legendary kṣatriya hero.[156] Yet among a number of early medieval ruling families there were claims to brāhmaṇa ancestry or brahma-kṣatriya status. Such fabrication of regular or indirect connections with the brāhmaṇa varṇa[157] may be evidence that it was sometimes the priestly clans among tribes which were actively involved in state formation.[158]

The category of brahma-kṣatriya has drawn the attention of a number of scholars. According to one view,[159] it indicates the adoption of rulership, the traditional occupation of a kṣatriya, by a brāhmaṇa, the change in occupation finally leading to a permanent change in status. Another view[160] regards brahma-kṣatriyas as descendants of mixed marriages between the brāhmaṇas and the kṣatriyas; and it is held that rulers showed a preference for the kṣatriya rank. A third view traces the origin of the historically known brahma-kṣatra families to the line of Pūru, as according to the Purāṇas both brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas were born in this line. Thus, recently it has been argued[161] that the progenitor of the Viṣṇukuṇḍī branch of the Āndhras was a descendant of Pūru and therefore a brahma-kṣatra; and the Viṣṇukuṇḍīs were the first to claim a brahma-kṣatra origin. It is further argued that the brahma-kṣatra *kula* started with the adoption of Bhāradvāja by Bharata in the line of Pūru; and, therefore, the brahma-kṣatra Pallavas were of the Bhāradvāja *gotra*.

However, the treatment of Purānic stories as authentic historical records is a trap into which historians fall too often. The possibility of genuine historical material existing alongside mythical narrative is not denied, but it is rightly remarked that the purpose of the authors of the purānas was not to write 'objective history'. 'To see confused history in these texts is to misinterpret the rationale of the documents'[162] and this rationale must be ascertained before we can proceed with interpretation. I would suggest that it is much more likely that the Purāna writers were trying to explain and authenticate the brahma-kṣatra phenomenon through the genealogy of Pūru and the story of the adoption of the brāhmaṇa child Bhāradvāja than *vice versa*.[163] This becomes more probable in view of the fact that the Purāṇas narrating these stories are dated approximately in the period between AD 400 and 900. The accounts contain several identical verses and it would be an interesting exercise to collate these and to work out the original source. Of the four texts generally cited in this context, the *Harivaṃśa*, the *Viṣṇu*, the *Matsya* and the *Bhāgavata Pūraṇas*, at least the last two are known to have been composed in central India and the south, where the category of brahma-kṣatra had emerged.

Only in early medieval times did a dynasty claiming a brāhmaṇa founder change over to kṣatriya rank, as happened in the case of the Ānandas, the Kadambas and the Pallavas.[164] No such change is seen in the case of earlier brāhmaṇa dynasties like the Śuṅgas, Kāṇvas and Vākātakas. The *Amarakośa*, written about the fifth century,[165] gives *rājabījī* and *rājavaṃśya* as two synonyms for a brāhmaṇa born in a royal family,[166] which shows that brāhmaṇas becoming rulers were not rare and did not mean a fall in status. The attempt to interpret the brāhma-kṣatra category as arising solely out of brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya mixed marriages would involve rationalizing on euhemeristic lines genealogical myths about the union between a brāhmaṇa parent and a Nāga king or princess of the underworld, as is done in the case of Māyideva, the feudatory of the Kadamba king, Kāmadeva.[167] An inscription of AD1216 describes Māyideva as a brahma-kṣatra belonging to the dynasty which sprang from the union of a brāhmaṇa girl with the Nāga king of the underworld. It offers a close parallel to the origin myth of the Chhotanagpur chiefs who trace their descent from the union of the serpent god Puṇḍarīka Nāga with a brāhmaṇa girl.[168] The latter claim to be Nāgavaṃśī kṣatriyas but their tribal origin is not in doubt. Such myths have been widely used by those autochthonous kingdom-builders who played a crucial role as agents of culture-change in their tribes,[169] and can hardly be treated as evidence of genuine matrimonial alliance between brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya families. Hence, even though we have a few historical examples of brāhmaṇas marrying kṣatriya[170] and even lower caste women in the manner approved by the Smṛtis, it is difficult to attribute the emergence of the brahma-kṣatra category to such marriages. The invention of a flattering and miraculous myth of origin is one of the techniques of severing bonds with the tribe.[171]

Thus the category of brahma-kṣatra seems to have had a multiple origin. It may have included tribal priests, who graduated to territorial kingship through internal developments within the tribe; it could also accommodate an occasional brāhmaṇa immigrant adventurer who succeeded in establishing his power in a tribal territory by aligning himself with influential tribal segments. In some cases it could have been pure fabrication with necessary variations to provide for a miraculous ancestry,

hence prestige and legitimacy, for a ruling chieftain. This would be especially so once the device had become well known and conventional. The important point however is that the brahma-kṣatra model like the later Rajput model is used in the context of state formation in the tribal periphery or partly brahmanized regions.

Two other significant aspects of the brahma-kṣatra phenomenon need to be emphasized. First, as Yadava remarks,[172] it shows the closeness of the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya varṇas. Second, it is a transitional category[173] in which preference is given to the kṣatriya status.[174] The latter tendency appears to me to be a projection of feudal values that attach special importance to a rank connected with the ownership and control of land, the prerogative of kṣatriyas in the traditional varṇa scheme. Interestingly the Arab writers of the tenth-eleventh centuries list two broad divisions of kṣatriyas as Sabkufriya or Sakriya and Kataria or Kastaria (identified as *sat-kṣatriyas* and ordinary kṣatriyas by Altekar), placing the former category even higher than the brāhmaṇa. We are further told that kings were chosen from the former class.[175] According to C.V. Vaidya, the former category represented the 'ruling kṣatriyas' and the latter ordinary 'agriculturists'.[176] Yadava agrees that the 'ruling landed aristocracy of kṣatriyas' claimed a superior status within the caste but adds that the distinction was not so much economic as reflecting the dislike of the older aristocracy of upstarts.[177] However, this need not mean that the higher rank was derived from descent from the ancient kṣatriya clans. Claims to pure kṣatriya status partly derived 'from the priority of their entrance to kṣatriyahood' but also from 'the size of territories politically and economically controlled'[178] The list[179] of thirty-six *kulīna vaṃśas* (pure clans) of the *rājaputras* given in the *Varṇa Ratnākara* includes Candellas (connected with the Kuṣāṇas) and Cālukis (Solaṅkis) of doubtful origin. The displacement of old kṣatriya ruling houses by new ones would ultimately result in the former being reduced to ordinary status while the latter would rise to higher rank.

The close correspondence between politico-economic status and social ranking is the most pronounced among the Rajputs/kṣatriyas, as even in theory their high status derived from temporal

power. Recent studies have shown that the Rajput lineage structure is characterized by a high degree of internal stratification in which the splitting into the 'elite' and 'common' Rajputs is an ongoing process. Owing to inheritance by primogeniture in the royal families, junior branches become commoners in the course of a few generations, with the resultant economic and social differentiations.[180] This process may be traced back to early times, as is indicated by reference[181] to kṣatriyas engaged in trade and agriculture, practices sanctioned by the law-books as approved behaviour for kṣatriyas in critical times.

The Rajputs have received a great deal of attention from Indologists, historians and sociologists; and a voluminous literature[182] exists on their origin and role in Indian history. Their stiff resistance to Turks and Mughal invaders provided the ideal material for those looking for model heroes to boost our morale in the struggle for independence. As a result, the main focus was on heroic exploits and problems of ancestry, especially in view of the theory put forward initially by some Western Indologists that the Rajputs were Indianized foreigners. The debate continues[183] although the consensus seems to favour a mixed origin of the Rajput caste developing out of a blending of Indianized foreigners, indigenous kṣatriyas and members of other varṇas as well as some aboriginal clans. Yet, the socio-economic processes which gave rise to this caste are only now beginning to receive attention.[184] The emerging picture discloses a landed aristocracy of disparate origins consolidating itself through a network of status-oriented hierarchical marriage alliances and political ties, which development finally transforms it into a caste.

The term *rājaputra* initially denoted a petty chief holding one or more villages. Under feudal conditions such chiefs formed a fairly large class of intermediaries enjoying considerable social prestige. Hence, even when crystallized into a kṣatriya caste, preference was shown for the title *rājaputra* (corrupted into Rajput), which had secular rather than ritual connotations. We need not deny correlation between the achievement of political power and the kṣatriyaization or Rajputization of a family or clan, but, as pointed out elsewhere,[185] the assertion of B.D. Chattopadhyaya that feudatory status was 'incompatible' with

the detailed fabrication of a respectable ancestry—such claims being made on behalf of only the 'sovereign families'[186]—is contradicted by a number of epigraphs. What is more, the assumption ignores an important feature of the 'political process' it seeks to explain, that is, the great amount of power and prestige enjoyed by the feudatories in the absence of a strong centralized power structure. In fact the power of feudatories was more tangible at the local level than that of the overlords, and once the device of establishing one's blue blood through invented relationship to old kṣatriya dynasties came in vogue, powerful local-level chiefs could not be lagging behind. For example, a family of local chiefs ruling in Maharashtra and owing allegiance to the Cālukya king Someśvara (I or II?) claimed to have belonged to the Agni-kula, being the descendants of the hero who was created out of the firepit by the sage Agastya to bring back his *kāmadhenu* cow after killing the evil minded rulers who had snatched it away.[187] Similar myths are recorded about Māyideva, a feudatory of the Kadambas and Becirāja, a 'feudatory minister' of Rācamalla of the Sinda family.[188]

It is curious that the phenomenon of brahma-kṣatra is especially evident in the Deccan and the south in early medieval times. It was not confined to a few major ruling houses like the Viṣṇukuṇḍins, Kadambas and Pallavas, but also involved feudatories and officials.[189] This suggests—in spite of the general scarcity of evidence—that it was not an isolated phenomenon but affected a section of the ruling class and was connected with the emergence and stabilization of a political structure. Conceptually it re-emphasized the unity of the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya elements.

Burton Stein, however, has argued[190] that in early south Indian history there was no collaboration between warriors and brāhmaṇas. The brāhmaṇas had been living as spiritual guides and neighbours of the 'respectable' peasant communities on the Coromandal plains long before the rise of the Pallavas, and the brāhmaṇa-peasant alliance was 'voluntary' and 'of mutual benefit'. As there was no need for brāhmaṇas to collaborate with warriors, there is no viable kṣatriya caste in south India. But Stein's dichotomization of the warrior and the peasant is

misleading. The culturally advanced agrarian societies of the south were naturally in opposition to predatory hill tribes for whom war and cattle raids were important as supplements to an uncertain means of livelihood. But this does not mean that the peasant communities supporting a non-producing priestly class were without internal differentiations. These contained specific groups, exercising control over basic economic resources through political power and force of arms, and others in subordinate positions without such control. In fact in south Indian history, as is the case with pre-capitalist social formations, it is not possible to dissociate economic from political control. Stein is aware of the 'existence of asymmetrical relationships'; and later [191] he used the terms 'dominant peasantry' and 'dependent peasantry' which indicate sharp cleavage in terms of power and status within the agrarian structure. In Tamil Nadu the Veḷḷāḷas constituted the dominant peasantry; and the *nāṭṭar*, the leading men of the *nādu*, belonged to this caste. They owned land and performed administrative and military functions. The point is further strengthened by Stein's suggestion that a large portion of the army of Rājarāja Coḷa was raised and commanded by the 'dominant peasantry',[192] the Veḷḷāḷas. In view of this it is difficult to regard the Veḷḷāḷa as antipodal to the warrior category. Like the kṣatriyas or Rajputs of the north, the Veḷḷāḷas, Reḍḍys and Kammas of the south were landowning groups. They formed the ruling stratum and were in alliance with brāhmaṇas. The dependence of brāhmaṇas on the agrarian sector and their contempt for the hill tribes and their way of life can hardly be interpreted as evidence of their indifference to the warrior or ruling class element in general. The ruling class took keen interest in extending agriculture and patronizing the brāhmaṇas. This is evident from the example of the Pallavas. The founder of this dynasty is said to have distributed free hundreds of thousands of ox-ploughs.

Thus, available evidence suggests that although a few brāhmaṇas from the north had infiltrated into the peasant communities, adopting the role of their priests and preceptors and spreading the idea of varṇa among them even in pre-Pallava times, exclusive brāhmaṇa villages known as *agrahāras* came

into existence largely through the patronage of kings and their feudatories in the Pallava and post-Pallava periods. The Śaṅgam literature contains some evidence[193] of the patronage of brāhmaṇas by ruling chiefs; and their close ties are exemplified in the story of Veḷ Pāri and Kapilār.[194] None the less, it is rightly remarked[195] that the Śaṅgam chiefs were semi-tribal chieftains who derived their legitimacy not from brāhmaṇas but from the possession of tribal symbols such as the drum, tutelary tree, or staff and from the panegyrics of bards. But the accumulation of surplus in the agrarian communities gradually led to the emergence of social differentiation and provided the base for the establishment of large territorial kingdoms. Varṇa ideology was needed to provide social cohesion beyond tribal ties, and inscriptions provide ample evidence of the collaboration of brāhmaṇas with rulers. Brāhmaṇas were invited and settled in Karnataka;[196] it is likely that such immigrants were settled in the Tamil country too.[197] But this does not mean that all or even a majority of the brāhmaṇas were from the north, for once the idea of varṇa became locally acceptable there was not much difficulty in the acceptance of the indigenous priestly class as brāhmaṇas.

D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma have stressed the role of brāhmaṇas in the expansion of agricultural settlements and acculturation of backward tribes. Brāhmaṇa villages were often created in new areas to extend cultivation, but occasionally they were also superimposed over existing settlements. However, it is clear that the main contradiction was not between brāhmaṇas and the Veḷḷāḷas who owned the land, but between the brāhmaṇas and the Veḷḷāḷas on the one hand and the depressed class of untouchables—now known as Ādi Draviḍas—and lower caste non-brāhmaṇas from the backward hill tribes (Padayāchi, Konar, Muppanār or Vaṉṉiyār), on the other. Whereas the Ādi Draviḍas supplies agricultural labour as *adimai* (serfs?), the lower ranking non-brāhmaṇas were reduced to the position of tenants leasing the land of brāhmaṇa or high caste non-brāhmaṇa landowners.[198] Such was the nature of the agrarian settlements supported by brāhmaṇas through the ideology of caste, in active alliance with the Veḷḷāḷas and other high caste landowner-

cultivators. Most rulers, chieftains and officials belonged to the Veḷḷāḷa and similar high-placed communities in early south Indian history.[199]

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Veḷḷāḷas in general were regarded as śūdras,[200] and a viable kṣatriya varṇa did not emerge in the south. It is sometimes argued[201] that although brāhmaṇas migrated east and south from the north India under the incentive of land grants as teachers and 'enlightened landowners' there was no bulk migration of the Vedic *viś* or the Aryan masses. Therefore, the non-Aryan population of these regions was ranked mainly as śūdras and these areas came to have only two varṇas—the brāhmaṇa and the śūdra. Migration was not however the significant factor in the spread of the varṇa system, which was flexible enough to accommodate tribal segments at various levels, not only as śūdras but also as vaiśyas, kṣatriyas and brāhmaṇas. The problem is to explain the general absence of both the kṣatriya and the vaiśya varṇas in eastern and southern India.

It is rightly maintained[202] that the non-emergence of the kṣatriya/Rajput varṇa in the south (and, we may add, in other regions of the periphery) was due to the fact that in these areas there was 'no conquering elite which might seek to preserve its identity through putative kṣatriya status' and by establishing kinship relations forged by widespread marriage networks rather than vertically in the absence of traditional local roots. Moreover, whereas the category of brāhmaṇa remained exclusive even in the larger and more complex society of early medieval times because of its monopoly of the ritual and priestly function—and as such could not be mistaken even when individual members of this varṇa took up other respectable occupations—secular power could change hands and cut across caste lines. This militated against the clear identification of a kṣatriya caste in areas where there were no ancient kṣatriya clans to provide the base. In the north, the four-tiered varṇa system had developed through the fission and fusion of later Vedic tribes in which the brāhmaṇa, the kṣatriya and the defeated śūdra were clearly identifiable and the vaiśya was a residual category of artisans, herdsmen, peasants and other independent producers. Yet by

the Gupta period śūdras had become peasants and artisans even in the north,[203] the cradle of the varṇa system, and the term vaiśya denoted primarily a trader. Therefore, the extension of the varṇa system to predominantly non-brahmanical areas in the south and east meant the categorization of peasant communities such as the Veḷḷāḷas, Kammas[204] and Kālitas[205] (of Assam and Orissa) as śūdra despite feeble claims to kṣatriya status owing to the strong position of these communities in the agrarian structure of these regions. These areas had two clearly identifiable varṇas on the basis of their profession, the brāhmaṇa and the śūdra; the category of vaiśya emerged only occasionally in times of trade[206] and that of kṣatriya could not take deep root even though it affected some sections of the ruling class. To explain the anomalous ranking of the landowning peasantry as śūdra, we will have to examine the history of the concept of the vaiśya and śūdra varṇas.

IV

R.S. Sharma has shown that in later Vedic times śūdras constituted a small servile class of defeated and dispossessed Aryans and non-Aryans employed in domestic labour. In post-Vedic and Mauryan times they were employed in agricultural labour on a large scale and their disabilities and servility increased. During this period some indigenous tribal groups were absorbed into the category of śūdras, but many other were accommodated in the second and third strata of society as warriors and peasants, that is, as kṣatriyas and vaiśyas. The situation changed in the succeeding epoch when with the weakening of state control and a flourishing trade and commerce the wages and living condition of śūdra labourers and artisans improved considerably. Crisis gripped the old order, as shown by the lamentations about the Kali age in the texts of this period, and it became increasingly difficult to collect taxes from primary producers, the vaiśyas and the śūdras. So the religious services and probably administrative services too began to be remunerated through land grants. Land grants to brāhmaṇas in backward and aboriginal areas led to the spread of iron-plough agriculture and the conversion of

aboriginal tribes into śūdra castes engaged in agriculture. Therefore brahmanical texts of the Gupta and post-Gupta times assign the varṇa duty of agriculture to śūdras, and brahmanism assimilated the religious practices of these new entrants and made them respectable. This development, coupled with improved material condition of śūdras, resulted in a more liberal attitude towards them in religious matters and conferment of new religious rights on them.[207] Beginning in the early centuries of the Christian era this process continued through the early medieval period and reached its culmination in the late medieval period.[208]

This neat hypothesis—no doubt convincing in its broad essentials—nevertheless leaves a few questions unanswered. It is argued that the settlement of brāhmaṇas in the aboriginal areas led to the transformation of tribal people into agriculturists who were given the rank of śūdras, but it is not explained why they could not be included in the third varṇa, for traditionally agriculture and cattle-rearing were the specific duties of the vaiśya varṇa. This becomes even more striking as Sharma accepts that tribal agriculturists were accommodated as vaiśyas in the earlier epoch. The change in attitude towards peasant communities in Gupta and post-Gupta times requires explanation.

It may be argued that the status of communities involved in manual work in agriculture and crafts declined in a feudal economy which developed a hierarchy of intermediaries deriving their income from land tilled by the primary producers. The ruling class developed a contempt towards manual labour and exploited those engaged in it. This was reflected in the social degradation of the peasant communities of the vaiśya varṇa and their approximation to śūdras in the Smṛti literature. Those tribes which entered the brahmanic fold at this stage and subsisted on agricultural labour came to be regarded as śūdras rather than as lowly vaiśyas in order to emphasize their obligation to serve the higher varṇas through performance of manual labour. But this is only a partial explanation. We may point out that from the beginning of the Christian era there is a clear tendency to regard trade and commerce as the distinctive occupation of the vaiśyas. The tradition of enumerating agriculture and cattle-rearing among

their varṇa-duties is maintained in the early Smṛtis of this period in conformity to earlier ideals; but even this is abandoned in a number of sources of the early medieval period, such as the *Devībhāgavata*[209] and the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*.[210] Derrett[211] is right in his assumption that the original varṇa-duty of agriculture was no longer associated with the vaiśya, who was now looked upon chiefly as a trader. This shift was primarily responsible for the categorization of peasant communities in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods as śūdras. At the root of the change lay contempt for manual labour and depression of the peasantry. Hence communities like the Kināśa, which continued to depend on agriculture, were degraded from vaiśya to śūdra status;[212] and as the distinctions between vaiśya agriculturists and śūdra agriculturists began to blur, well-to-do vaiśyas turned to trade and commerce. We may suggest that one of the reasons of the popularity of Jainism among vaisyas was the fact that it emphasized their dissociation from agriculture to which they had been devoted earlier. Moreover, the subdivisions of the vaiśya varṇa mentioned in the early medieval sources of north India have either a territorial or occupational basis and none of these indicate an aboriginal tribal background.[213] This suggests fragmentation of the vaiśya varṇa in the north following the loss of status of those who were still dependent on agriculture and cattle breeding. The influential sections of the vaiśya community engaged in trade and commerce in western India consciously emphasize[214] their subcaste affiliation rather than their varṇa ranking. Some prosperous sections of the community even began to claim kṣatriya origin[215] and had access to political roles.[216]

This argument derives additional support from the chronology of brahmanical expansion as reflected in inscriptions. The regions of Maharashtra and Gujarat appear to have been acculturated in the period between 200 BC and AD 500, when trade was an important factor in the economy but the peasantry had begun to be depressed, and agriculture had come to be associated with the śūdras. These areas developed a four-tiered varṇa system, but the third stratum consisted of the mercantile classes mainly. The spread of brahmanic culture to the major portions of southern and eastern India appears to have taken place a little later in

circumstances characterized by a general decline in trade. Therefore a vaiśya varṇa did not emerge in these areas and non-Aryan peasant communities were assimilated as śūdras, although trading communities often made use of the concept of vaiśya, as is indicated by the Tamil classic *Śilappadikāram* which has the vaiśya Kovalan as its hero, and the *Vaiśya Purāṇa* composed in the Āndhra country in medieval times.[217]

We may further assert that it is a mistake to think of southern and eastern India as having two-tiered social structures represented by the brāhmaṇa and the śūdra. In terms of power and prestige early medieval India as a whole developed a social system with three broad strata—the brāhmaṇa, the kṣatriya or Rajput and the śūdra in the north and the brāhmaṇa, the *sat*-śūdra and the *asat*-śūdra in the south[218] and east. The vaiśya varṇa appears to have shrunk considerably in numerical strength and was confined to specific areas. The difference in the varṇa ranking of the middle stratum appears to have been more a matter of historical heritage than of actual significance in terms of social status. For theoretically the contradiction was no longer between the 'twice-born' and the 'once-born', but between those castes which were created out of approved unions (hence 'pure') and those originating from undesirable unions ('impure'). 'Pure' castes included not only the four principal varṇas but all those non-brāhmaṇa castes of high status, which were described as *sat*-śūdras or *uttamasaṃkaras*. A distinction between the *aniravasita* and *niravasita* śūdra appears in the north as early as the time of Pāṇini,[219] but as Patañjali's commentary indicates, even in the second century BC higher śūdras, who could eat food from the plate of an Ārya without defiling it permanently, were either foreigners settled in India (Śakas or Yavanas) or blacksmiths washermen or carpenters, from whom the *niravasita* śūdras, such as the Cāṇḍālas and the Mṛtapas, were clearly separated. However, in the south and the east the distinction between the *sat* and the *asat* śūdras lay in the demarcation of peasant communities from the culturally backward tribes and artisan groups dependent on the landowning peasantry for their subsistence. The gulf was wide enough for the postulation of a fifth varṇa, as is indicated by a comment of Śaṅkarācārya[220] and

a passage of the *Sāmba Purāṇa*.[221] It is significant that whereas the former source reflects the trend in south India,[222] the latter very likely represents Orissa, as this Purāṇa is especially devoted to Sun worship. A number of epigraphs show that birth in the high ranking śūdra castes was not considered low at all—in actual practice śūdras ranked next to brāhmaṇas. The śūdra rulers appear as zealous patrons of the institution of caste and of brāhmaṇas, and express pride in having been born from the feet of Viṣṇu.[223] Some even assumed brahmanical *gotras*.[224]

The accretion of powerful peasant communities to the śūdra varṇa had important consequences. It meant development of regional variations and divergence in actual practice from the fourfold gradation still maintained in theory. Futher, it upgraded the śūdra status and it became necessary to clearly distinguish it from the lowly depressed castes. Since the idea of a primary *pañcama* varṇa had no Vedic or scriptural authority, it was not very successful and the brahmanical law-givers used the device of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* to rank hierarchically the non-brāhmaṇa castes and to rationalize and explain ideologically the wide gulf of statuses among them. In a remarkably perceptive article, 'From Varṇa to Caste through Mixed Unions', S.J. Tambiah[225] points out that the lawgivers were preoccupied with permuting *pratiloma* type unions generating a large number of degraded castes, showing little concern with the results of the permutation of the unions of the approved *anuloma* type. The rationale of this feature of the theory of mixed castes was grounded in a hierarchical society 'which had steep gradation of statuses' with a very large number of castes occupying lowly positions in actuality. To me this means greater polarization of the numerically small upper castes and the large number of lower castes: consider, for example, the statement in some early medieval texts about *agravarṇa* (high varṇa) and the *hīnavarṇa* (low varṇa) constituting two broad divisions of society.[226]

Most historians dealing with the post-Vedic society have tried to explain the significance of the *anuloma* and the *pratiloma* castes; and although the Dharmaśāstra accounts of their origin through mixed unions are still taken at their face value in some writings,[227] there is a general awareness that the theory of mixed

castes is a priestly invention.[228] It was devised to explain the existence of numerous endogamous groups of diverse origin and to rank them in a hierarchy according to their actual status within the frame of varṇa. Of course, due allowance has to be made to priestly bias and uneven development in different regions while dealing with specific cases.[229] Nevertheless, it is significant that in the *varṇasaṃkara* theory the impurity of castes does not arise from their adoption of low professions, but the reverse: those of impure birth are condemned to occupations of low status. It is rightly argued[230] that in the four-varṇa theory the higher rank enjoys greater accessibility to non-polluting occupations, and 'power' and 'status' coincide. I may add that the theory of purity and pollution arising from birth through approved or disapproved unions further affirms the basic principles inherent in the varṇa system by denying access to social prestige and power to so-called impure castes through non-polluting occupations. The elaboration of the varṇa scheme with an accent on birth rather than function was made to provide ideological support to the three-tiered stratification of the medieval period.

Comparative studies of the varṇa system in regions like Bengal and the south could be rewarding as they offer a number of parallels. We may not agree with N.K. Dutt[231] that the 'jealousy' between the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya varṇas led the former to suppress and abolish the latter category once power passed into the hands of Muslim conquerors; for even in the thirteenth century in the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* (which reflects conditions in Bengal), the *rājaputra* caste figures as *uttamasaṃkara* (high mixed caste) of śūdra status, entitled to priestly services from the Śrotriya brāhmaṇas.[232] Nevertheless, the fact remains that despite the claims of later Pāla, Sena and Varman kings to kṣatriyahood, not only did a clearly defined kṣatriya caste fail to emerge in Bengal, but even those kings were described as of the Kāyastha caste by the informant cited in the *Ain-i-Akbari.*[233] It is pointed out that in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, the Vaidyas and Kāyasthas of Bengal had no objection to being ranked as śūdras.[234] The process of improving the status of the śūdras reached its culmination in such medieval texts[235] obviously meant for the guidance of the śūdras as *Śūdrācāra Śiromaṇi,*

written by Śeṣa Kṛṣṇa,[236] who states[237] that although ordinarily the Śūdras are not allowed *saṃskāras*, an exception is made to this general rule (*pratiprasava*) by allowing them the right to perform the *pañcamahāyajñas, śrāddha, garbhādhāna, nāmakaraṇa, niṣkramaṇa, annaprāśana* and *karṇavedha*. It is further added that the *karṇavedha* takes the place of the *yajñopavīta* in the case of śūdras.[238] It is interesting that the term *pañcamāhayajña*, which earlier denoted the five daily sacrifices performed by a brāhmaṇa,[239] were later suitably modified and recommended for a śūdra.[240]

The contradictory nature of our evidence on the śūdra varṇa in different regions and for the extensive period of medieval Indian history shows that the term was used to denote widely disparate and unequal groups such as the outcastes, the *ardhasīrin* sharecroppers, artisans, peasants, Kāyasthas, Vaidyas, Reḍḍys, Veḷḷāḷas, etc. Some of the latter groups had even given rise to important ruling dynasties. It has been pointed out that the feudal hierarchy cut across varṇa lines. All this shows that secular factors had placed the varṇa theory under severe strain and the four-varṇa hierarchy was transformed into a hierarchy of numerous endogamous groups of diverse origins. The basic principle, the intertwining of the pure and the dominant, however, remained unchanged.

In a thought-provoking study Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya[241] has argued that those physicians whose 'science-consciousness' went against the requirements of social hierarchy were condemned as śūdras by the brāhmaṇa lawgivers, and it was laid down that the twice-born should not take up the physician's profession, that is for the Ambaṣṭhas. Since knowledge and expertise in ancient times generally passed from father to son, the degradation of the physician may have led to the formation of the Vaidya caste in Bengal deriving from divergent sources and ranked as a clean-śūdra caste. Brahmanical prejudice is said to be at the root of ranking the Kāyastha caste too as śūdra.[242] But it needs to be pointed out that no amount of brāhmaṇa prejudice would have made their regulations acceptable to the people at large without a major change having taken place in the meaning and significance of the 'śūdra' which could

accommodate Kāyasthas,[243] Vaidyas, Veḷḷāḷas and Reḍḍys at one end of the spectrum, and Cāṇḍālaṣ at the other. The notion that a śūdra was born for the service of the *dvijas* could mean only the patronage of brāhmaṇas in the case of the well-to-do high-caste śūdras, the term *dvija* becoming synonymous with brāhmaṇa; but the brahmanical theory of the pure and the impure provided a strong ideological instrument for ensuring that depressed groups remained so.

V

The history of 'impure' castes or untouchables[244] did not receive much attention in the nationalist phase of Indian historiography which was more interested in the glorification of the past and preferred to stay clear of the unsavoury aspects. It is remarked[245] that the lack of interest in the fortunes of lower communities was due to the vision of the historians being limited by their own dominant-class outlook. None the less, the idea and practice of untouchability in Hindu society was striking enough to have given rise to a number of theories regarding its origin. The B.R. Ambedkar theory that the roots of untouchability lay in the deliberate policy of the brāhmaṇas, who were full of contempt and hatred towards those who continued to eat beef, and isolated themselves from the brahmanical tradition by embracing Buddhism, has been successfully refuted by Vivekanand Jha on cogent grounds.[246] Jha also rejects[247] the theory of N.K. Dutt who thought that the spirit of contempt culminating in untouchability was borrowed by the Aryans from the Dravidians who were culturally far superior to the pre-Dravidian aborigines and who treated them as 'pariahs'. Dutt had asserted that untouchability was not a part of the original Indo-Aryan institutions.[248] It has been pointed out[249] that there is nothing to show that Dravidians practised untouchability before their coming in contact with Aryan culture, or that the southerners had a more conservative and contemptuous attitude towards śūdras, which category subsumed the untouchable groups in the centuries preceding the Christian era. Nevertheless, the temptation to treat the attribution of impurity to social groups as a unique phenomenon

rather than as an extreme form of class exploitation often leads scholars to trace this practice to the pre-Aryan period and as something endemic to 'the Indian style of life'.

Some time ago Fürer-Haimendorf put forward an interesting hypothesis in favour of the urban origin of untouchability. He remarked[250] that the untouchables have no particularly close connection with the soil; they are generally craftsmen like leather workers and weavers, or menials working as watchmen, sweepers, etc., whose services are essential to urban life but may not be needed in the rural areas; and he points out that even today there is no need for scavengers in the smaller Indian villages. Further, whereas in the villages nearly everyone is engaged in agriculture and there is less contempt for manual labour, towns have greater economic and cultural disparity and poor people living in squalor and compelled to pursue 'unclean' occupations are inevitably segregated and banished to the urban periphery in a society which identifies personal cleanliness with purity. Fürer-Haimendorf concedes that once the idea of untouchability developed in urban or semi-urban settlements it could spread to villages as well, as 'it is everywhere the towns which set the standard'. He even ventures to suggest a link 'between untouchable craftsmen of Dravidian India and the "industrial" proletariat of the ancient Indus towns, whose ultimate break-up might even account for the dispersal of untouchables throughout other parts of India'. But he admits that 'such a hypothesis would be little more than speculation' and although everything suggests the urban origin of untouchability, it is not yet possible to pin it down to a specific period of Indian history.

As we have seen already, the putative polluting nature of craftsmen in the Indus culture has not a shred of evidence in its support; the workmen living in separate quarters resembling modern coolie lines were apparently engaged in pounding grain, a non-polluting occupation. As to the suggested urban origin of untouchability, we may point out that in spite of the inadequacy of our researches, it is well known that the ideas of untouchability and unapproachability of certain social groups deriving from the concept of ritual pollution were developed and carried to the extreme in rural India in the Middle Ages. Medieval writers

making prescriptions in this regard almost invariably have a rural setting in mind. Would the practice have become so rigorous and deep-seated if its roots lay in an urban environment? Nevertheless, we have no hesitation in accepting Furer-Haimendorf's total rejection of the views of those who regard untouchables as remnants of a conquered aboriginal population and his emphatic assertion that on the whole there is closer racial approximation between the local Hindu castes and the untouchables than between the untouchables and the surviving aboriginals.

George L. Hart[251] has suggested that we can trace the origin of the concept of pollution inhering in certain social groups to the ancient Tamils, more specifically to the ancient Tamil idea of the sacred which, in his opinion, was conceived as a capricious and potentially malevolent power. It represented death, destruction and anarchy. From this concept developed the idea that those who controlled the sacred and came in contact with it were themselves dangerous and had the power to pollute others. Consequently, they occupied a low status in the ancient Tamil world. According to Hart's interpretation[252] of certain poems of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* collection, the Pāṇan (that is, the bard), the Tuṭiyan (one who played the *tuṭi* drum), the Paraiyan (one who played the *kiṇai* drum) and the Kaṭampan (very probably the priest of the god Murugan) were low caste people, and in his opinion this was because they were involved in controlling the malevolent supernatural forces by playing the lute or various types of drums during battle and other solemn occasions such as birth and death. Hart asserts that earlier scholars such as Nilakanta Sastri and Kailasapathy[253] have either ignored or wrongly understood these passages, and in ancient Tamil society the purity/pollution principle functioned in the same manner as it did in later brahmanical society. He is certain that the ancient Tamils observed restrictions on connubium as well as commensality long before coming under brahmanic influence, and even though rules regarding contact were not as rigid as in later times, 'then as now, a person of high caste would not take food from the hands of someone of low caste'.[254]

In spite of these bold and original assertions, the evidence

produced by Hart is not only extremely weak but also contradictory. He acknowledges that at least one-tenth of the Pulavans, that is, the composers of Śaṅgam poetry, were brāhmaṇas and he regards this estimate very much on the low side.[255] In view of this it is difficult to accept that the society reflected in the Śaṅgam literature is completely free of brahmanical prejudice. No doubt brahmanical hold became stronger in later centuries but the very fact that the brāhmaṇas were highly honoured and enjoyed the highest social status indicates that the process of brahmanization (with its corollary, the concept of social hierarchy) had already begun to take root in ancient Tamil society. Further, connubial restrictions are not typical of caste society alone; they prevail in tribal societies also. The contention that among the ancient Tamils these were based not on the tribal notions of kinship but on caste hierarchy is yet to be proved. With regard to commensality, on the basis of a poem[256] which describes the feeding of a corpse by a Pulaiyan, Hart draws the inference that the food touched by a Pulaiyan must have been considered polluted and unacceptable to men of higher castes. But this is evidently an unwarranted assumption deriving from our knowledge of what happened in later times. On the other hand, Hart himself quotes poems which speak of kings eating and drinking in the company of bards, supposedly of low caste, and remarks that the commensal taboo was not universally observed.

Hart is on surer ground when he speaks[257] of the prevalence of ceremonial bathing, the taboo on menstruating women, puerperium, etc., among the ancient Tamils. He has produced enough data to show that these taboos derived mainly from the belief that at certain times women possessed 'sacred power' which could be dangerous to others and therefore had to be carefully controlled. He further argues that as according to the Tamils contact with the 'sacred' was polluting, they regarded women as temporarily polluted but certain social groups as permanently polluted owing to their constant dealings with the 'sacred' It is often argued [258] that temporary and permanent impurities are identical in nature and continuous association with polluted things results in permanent impurity. This point is

emphasized by Louis Dumont, who remarks that organic activities cause only temporary impurity in individual life, hence, a member of the 'clean' caste gets polluted only temporarily. But constant involvement with impure tasks because of the hereditory nature of professions and crafts in ancient India led to 'massive' or permanent impurity of certain castes. Hart's, argument is based on similar assumptions. For him, the notion of pollution springs from the dangerous nature of the sacred power. Hence, a woman is defiled temporarily and a Paraiyan permanently; and their power to harm others was sought to be controlled by keeping them at a distance. However, I may point out that contact with the dangerous sacred would not necessarily lower the status of the people involved, if it were merely a question of religious feelings. On the contrary, it would have most likely conferred superior power and status on them. Among African tribes the female generative power was linked with formal prestige and power and the African priestess-queen enjoyed superior authority which rested on her supernatural role as rainmaker ensuring the fertility of plants and animals.[259] It is rightly asserted that initially women were profane and uninitiated with regard to men's rituals and men were profane and uninitiated with regard to women's rituals, both sexes enjoying complete autonomy within the imperatives of reciprocity.[260] It was only with differential access to economic resources and the rise of private property that the subordination of woman began and her sphere of the sacred came to be looked upon not only as dangerous for men but also 'polluting'. The subordination of the female sex is already complete even in the earliest Tamil poetry, and a similar process seems to have begun in the case of indigenous Dravidian shamans and musicians, since music is an important means of controlling the sacred in primitive societies. Hart concedes that Vēlaṉ, priest of the god Murugan, is never described as low or base in Śaṅgam poems but his descendants now form a subcaste of the lowly Paraiyans in modern Kerala. The traditional hostility of the Paraiyans to the brāhmaṇas reflected in their 'ceremonial antipathy' towards the latter, as recorded by Thurston,[261] and their creation myths suggest that the custodians of the Aryan sacred tradition played a crucial role in the degradation of these

peoples. D.D. Kosambi has shown how brahmanical ideology was instrumental in introducing a class structure in tribal societies and in validating the domination of the tribal chief and his nobility over the rest of the tribe. It is not without significance that the Tamil king, the highest representative of the sacred, 'the central embodiment of sacred powers that had to be present and under control for the proper functioning of society' in the words of Hart,[262] had no stigma of pollution attached to him. But the Paraiyan, in spite of his retaining the traditional role[263] in controlling the indigenous sacred powers on several occasions and sacred spots, was degraded and condemned to certain menial and unclean tasks on a perpetual basis. Besides, not all sections of Paraiyans perform the priestly functions or act as grave-diggers. In the time of Rājarāja Coḷa their two main subdivisions are said to have been weavers (Nesavu) and ploughmen (Ulavu).[264] Obviously the condemnation of these people as impure and their hereditary pursuit of the profession of scavenging were not the causes but the consequences of their degradation.[265]

In fact the very idea of what is polluting evolved over a long span of time in which material factors such as depression of a community engaged in a particular type of manual labour appears to have played a major role. This is well illustrated by the case of *carmakāras* or leather-workers. The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (XVI.13.13) speaks of milk in 'leather bags' used in sacrificial ritual, and the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*[266] refers to hundreds of leather bags filled with clarified butter (*ghee*), honey, rice, fried grain, etc. Enough evidence[267] has been produced to show that the profession of leather work was not considered low in later Vedic times. Contemporary Hindu prejudice against leather as a polluting substance is obviously a later development.

Earlier, Hutton had expressed the view[268] that the taboo on accepting food cooked by a person of another caste was the 'keystone' of the whole system, the taboo on marrying outside the caste being an inevitable outcome of the former prejudice. This has been reiterated in some recent historical analyses and an attempt is made to explain untouchability as deriving from deep-rooted 'psychological' inhibitions.[269] Indeed this view acquires some *apparent* credibility from the modern experience

which shows the wide prevalence of elaborate and divergent rules regarding the acceptability of *kacca*[270] and *pakka*[271] food among both so-called 'high' and 'low' castes. But a closer scrutiny of the regulations governing the cooking and partaking of a meal in a traditional set-up reveals that these are a curious amalgam of the brahmanical concept of hierarchy and certain primitive ideas which regard eating and drinking as magico-religious activities of mysterious significance. Thus to the latter nexus we may assign the orthodox practice of regarding cooked *kaccā* food as contaminated if touched by a person who had not had a bath and put on fresh clothes even though he/she was perfectly eligible to do so otherwise. Obviously in this case the act of eating is viewed as a sacrament, a religious rite for which utmost purity has to be observed. As has been pointed out, such ideas are not confined to Hindu society and may be traced among other peoples as well.[272] But to regard such notions of purity as primary factors in the evolution of a social system in which social groups or castes were isolated, ranked and interrelated on the basis of mutual acceptability of food and water is to put the cart before the horse. Further, it ignores the crucial fact that the entire network of purity/pollution functioned with the brāhmaṇa as its point of reference. The crux of the problem is not that certain notions of commensality and connubium have tribal roots, but that these should have been woven into the social fabric in such a manner as to institutionalize inter-group inequality by providing religious sanction to the crassest form of class exploitation.

I have cited elsewhere[273] a number of Vedic passages which indicate the absence of prejudice against accepting cooked food from members of another tribe or caste. For example, according to the prescription of some Śrautasūtras, the performer of the *viśvajit* sacrifice must live with the Niṣādas in their village for three nights and eat their food. The Niṣādas were a non-Aryan tribe living on the peripheries of Aryan settlements in later Vedic times, but were condemned as untouchables in later law-books.[274] R.S. Sharma has drawn attention[275] to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* passage which instructs the kṣatriya and *viś* to eat from the same vessel. The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* lays down that when śūdras work as cooks in a brāhmaṇa household, their work should be

supervised by a member of any of the three upper *varṇas* and the śūdra cooks should shave their hair and beard and pare their nails every day and also bathe with all their clothes on.[276] The *Amarakośa* mentions synonyms for those of the Vaiśya *varga* who cook and refers to the *sūpakāra* and *ballava*,[277] who cooked vegetables, according to the commentator Kṣīrasvāmin, and follows it up with four other synonyms, *āndhasika, sūda, audanika* and *guṇa*.[278] Of these, *āndhasika* and *audanika* were evidently those who cooked or boiled rice, which the current orthodox practice would describe as *kaccā* food acceptable only if cooked by one belonging to one's own caste or by a brāhmaṇa. But the *Amarakośa* evidence suggests that the cooks employed in the kitchen of well-to-do people belonged to the vaiśya caste. Later in the *Laghu Āśvalāyanasmṛti*, generally ascribed to the period AD 700 to 900, it is prescribed that a brāhmaṇa should take only that food which is cooked by himself or one of the following persons: his wife, daughter-in-law, son, pupil, teacher, and the son of his teacher.[279] This text lays down that a brāhmaṇa may accept from anyone milk and sugarcane products and items cooked in oil, milk and clarified butter, but not those with which water is mixed.[280] Here we have a clear textual prohibition of what is now known as a *kaccā* meal. Such notions developing among the brāhmaṇa circles were gradually adopted by other castes and rigidity in such matters became a symbol of high status. Nevertheless, a number of documents of the thirteenth century included in the *Lekhapaddhati*,[281] a collection of model documents for the use of scribes compiled in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, show the employment of female slaves simultaneously in all types of work, 'clean' and 'unclean', as a matter of course without any inkling of the idea that a person obliged to carry out 'impure' jobs professionally becomes defiled and unfit for 'pure' work like cooking food. Interestingly a document dated 1230-1 speaks of the sale of a Rajput girl named Sampūrī to a merchant on account of a terrible famine. It is agreed that she will perform 'the duties of cutting, grinding, sweeping, fetching drinking water, smearing the floor with cowdung, throwing away human excreta (and) all other household duties, and (engage in) outside work (such as) cultivation, other field work, etc.,

zealously perform all these tasks during three seasons, rainy, winter and summer, throughout the day and night, untiringly and without giving any reply'.[282]

It may be argued that since law-books are brahmanical compositions, we tend to attribute a brahmanical origin to even those concepts which in fact may have been borrowed from a non-brahmanical source. Nevertheless, we may point out that the brāhmaṇas as a priestly class had always been preoccupied with rituals and external religious observances. The priestly outlook invested every human action with religious significance and gradually evolved an ideology which made the preservation of the purity of the brāhmaṇa varṇa from external contact its primary concern. These ideas, developing within the hierarchical social framework of the varṇa order, not only led to the concept of the brāhmaṇa as the purest, but also that purity/impurity of a particular social group had to be measured in terms of its ritual distance from the brāhmaṇa varṇa. This undoubtedly proves that the ideology originated and developed in brāhmaṇa circles. We need not necessarily view it as a sudden invention or 'a diabolical contrivance'of malevolent brāhmaṇas, for the roots of this ideology lay in the growth and intensification of class relations with the emergence of a ruling class exercising control over land and the labour of the exploited classes. Brāhmaṇas were, by and large, both active members as well as ideologues of this ruling class and perfected a theory which expressed dominant material relationships in ritual terms with themselves as the point of reference. It is indeed indicative of the dominance of the brāhmaṇa varṇa in the socio-economic context of early medieval times that its ideology became the ideology of all and emulation of its customs (the process of Sanskritization) became an important vehicle for social mobility.

This is not to imply that there were no poor brāhmaṇas in early medieval society or even earlier. In fact, poverty had obliged some brāhmaṇas to trade on their ritual purity and earn their livelihood by serving others and cooking for them, as is indicated by a tenth-century inscription.[283] Yet the theory of purity/pollution was not the product of such brāhmaṇa commoners. It was apparently developed by those who engaged in the study and

teaching of scriptures and lived in *agrahāras* donated by the ruling powers. And this explains the material foundations of this ideology. It grew out of the same social conditions which gave rise to Tantricism in the early medieval period. *Śaucācāra*, the ideology of pure/impure, and Tantricism were two sides of the same coin produced by interaction with aboriginal tribal population and their assimilation. The former reflects the pre-occupation of the orthodox with the preservation of purity by maintenance of social distance, the latter involved breaking of social taboos and incorporated social protest to brahmanical orthodoxy. Both were responses to the deepening of class contradictions. The function of the ideology of purity/pollution was to legitimize the low status and exploitation of a large section of the population, segregated and fragmented to the advantage of the ruling classes.[284]

Had the ideology of purity and impurity been a simple outcome of the primitive fear of pollution through indiscriminate commensality, we would expect greater rigidity and exclusiveness in the earlier stages of the caste system. But as we have seen, both early Tamil as well as Sanskrit sources indicate that rules regarding interdining and intermarriage became more strict with the passage of time.[285] The ideology of purity/pollution pre-supposes the existence of impure groups, but it can hardly be denied that the emergence of the so-called impure or untouchable groups is a later phenomenon in the history of the caste system.

In an illuminating study[286] of the history of untouchables in India up to AD 1200 Vivekanand Jha has distinguished four major developmental stages. He points out that the *Ṛgveda* shows no knowledge of people who must not be touched. Neither do the later Vedic texts give any indication of untouchability, although the tribal groups of the Cāṇḍālas and the Pulkasas are mentioned with malice and revulsion. In the second phase, extending up to AD 200, certain tribal groups like the Cāṇḍālas and the Pulkasas emerge clearly as untouchables. The third phase, being a continuation of the second, throws up some more ethnic groups as untouchables, but the peak is attained in the fourth phase from AD 600 to 1200, when a number of occupational groups such as the *carmakāras* and the *rajakas* are degraded

to untouchable status and several new ethnic groups are added to the list.

Commenting on Jha's conclusions, B.N.S. Yadava emphasizes[287] the material roots of the institution of untouchability. He agrees with Jha in linking the increase in the number of untouchable groups in early medieval times to the stagnant village economy which allowed little mobility to artisans and craftsmen. Yet Yadava points out that the resistance to the process of Hinduization by aboriginal people and their consequent degradation to the position of untouchables presents only one side of the story; we should also investigate the extent to which closer integration meant greater economic dependence and exploitation. I may add that this line of argument is fully backed by contemporary field experience. Fürer-Haimendorf observes:

> [O]n the whole it is not the aboriginals standing outside the caste system who suffer from the most severe social disabilities, but the depressed classes who for centuries have lived in closest association with caste-Hindus. Many aboriginals eat beef and follow other habits objectionable to Hindus without being treated as untouchables, whereas members of depressed classes cannot gain admittance to Hindu society even though they may have personally abandoned such customs . . . the aboriginal cultivator, be he Gond or Munda, looks down upon the untouchable in the same manner as does any caste Hindu.[288]

This is not to deny that many aboriginal groups have indeed been assimilated as untouchables or śūdras depending upon the degree of socio-economic backwardness. Hutton's remark[289] that when primitive tribes come within the Hindu fold they form outcastes or depressed castes may be correct to a large extent, even though his attempt to explain this as a consequence of their lack of prejudice against certain occupations and certain kinds of food abhorred by the Hindus is unacceptable.[290] We have seen that caste hierarchy develops earlier but that prejudices against certain types of food, drinks and occupations are of later growth. Besides, quite often a depressed people has no alternative but to follow occupations of low social esteem. Once again one finds here effect being mistaken as cause.

There is no doubt that the impingement of brahmanical society

on tribes often results in their being deprived of their earlier means of production and ensuing dependence. This is particularly true of the earlier period of Indian history when much of the land which was earlier the habitat and means of sustenance of the aboriginal tribes was brought under cultivation through land grants to brāhmaṇas. The impact of brahmanical culture helps the process of social stratification and disintegration of egalitarian tribal structures. It may allow individual families or lineage segments access to higher social status, dissociating them from the main body of the tribe, which in turn may be subjected to rigid socio-economic exploitation. Hutton points out that 'socially superior individuals' belonging to those very tribes which are reduced to the position of 'exterior castes' were frequently incorporated as Rajputs or kṣatriyas. This process has been very well illustrated by a study of the Bhumij tribe whose members rose to Rajput Bhumij status at one end of the social scale and fell to 'Nichu' Bhumij at the other.[291] Equally revealing could be studies of a number of other depressed communities, as for example the Doms, who are at present regarded as the lowest even among the untouchables. But they are known to have founded kingdoms in the Himalayan foothills in the thirteenth century,[292] and the defeat of an aboriginal Dom chief is mentioned in an inscription from Karnataka.[293] The need for using the combined methods of anthropology, archaeology and Indology cannot be overstressed with regard to the history of the 'untouchable' communities. Analyses based solely on the Dharmaśāstra material written by and meant for the upper castes tend to give a distorted and one-sided picture.

VI

The beginnings of women's studies in Indological literature may be traced to Rammohun Roy's first tract on *satī* in which he tried to prove that the burning of widows was not an ancient custom prescribed by the Dharmaśāstras but a later evil linked to widow's right of inheritance. Similarly in 1855 Isvarachandra Vidyasagara wrote two brief treatises in support of remarriage of Hindu widows, quoting passages from Kātyāyana, Parāśara and other

smṛti writers. The context of social reform and the nationalist quest for indigenous models for the revitalization of Indian society provided strong impetus for the study of the condition of women in ancient India. Useful monographs such as B.S. Upadhyaya's *Women in Ṛgveda*[294] and A.S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*[295] seem to have been penned under such stimulus. It is suggested[296] that Orientalist scholars such as Clarise Bader[297] and J.J. Meyer were drawn towards the study of ancient Indian society owing to their disillusionment with the gross materialism of industrial society, which had eroded family ties in the West and admired the archetypal self-sacrificing woman completely subordinating herself to the interests of the family. Notwithstanding the Orientalist bias in such reconstructions, much information was brought to light through diligent research that was later supplemented by studies on the condition of women in a particular type of source or sub-period and with women's juridical and ritualistic position or some other specific role in mind.[298]

Most of these studies were however descriptive, rarely modifying the picture drawn by A.S. Altekar in his classic work; and his views continue to exercise deep influence on later scholars.[299] Indian Marxist scholars too are accused of depending on the outdated theories of nineteenth-century anthropologists because of the strong impact of F. Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private property and the State.* Later researches have pointed out certain errors made by Morgan and Engels and a reassessment of their theories has been undertaken.[300] The result is that whereas the basic ideas of Engels regarding the relationship of property to class and sex stand reinforced, many of his views regarding the stages of savagery, group-marriage[301] and matriarchy are now abandoned. Even so the influence of Morgan and Engels on studies of women, family or kinship in ancient India has been extremely limited; little effort has been made to see whether the structural position of women and the institutions and customs affecting them were expressions of the socio-economic set-up in which women were situated.

Nevertheless, it is generally recognized that the situation has progressively deteriorated from the time of the *Ṛgveda* when

women enjoyed more rights and freedom. Altekar thought that primitive communities which had 'not yet emerged from barbarism' evolved few checks on the tyranny of men over women, and in these communities women were underfed and overworked; so he felt a deep satisfaction over the fact that the position of women in the Vedic age was 'much better than what we ordinarily expect it to have been'.[302] Similar sentiments were expressed by other writers.[303] None the less, such remarks reflect only popular misconceptions about so-called barbaric or primitive peoples, not a scientific anthropological understanding. Even those anthropologists who argue that women have been subordinate to men in early societies that subsisted on hunting and gathering do not draw such a dismal picture as imagined by Altekar.

It is being increasingly demonstrated that the role of woman as gatherer has been grossly underestimated owing to a male bias in anthropology;[304] and while some anthropologists emphatically maintain that early societies were sexually egalitarian, having relations of reciprocity rather than subordination, others point out that hunting societies did subordinate women to men in certain respects, but men did not exercise the amount of control over women as they did in class societies.[305] Society in the Ṛgvedic period had certainly gone beyond the state of gathering and hunting; but for an assessment of the position of women as reflected in the earliest portions of the *Ṛgveda,* an understanding of their place in production is necessary.

If we regard the *vidatha* as the earliest folk assembly of the Indo-Aryans with distributive as well as other functions,[306] then the question of women's participation in it will have to be related to their role in food production. Our data are meagre, but it is important to raise significant questions. According to Irawati Karve, in the early passages of the *Ṛgveda* a common word for father and mother, that is, parents, could be derived from either the dual form of *mātṛ* or of *pitṛ;* both the terms conveyed the same meaning, but later, only the dual form of *pitṛ* was used while referring to the two parents.[307] This suggests the transition of Vedic society from an egalitarian organization to a patriarchal

structure. More research is obviously needed to establish this hypothesis on a firm basis.

Related to the question of women's status are the problems of kinship structure and the nature of the family organization. A number of Indologically-oriented sociologists such as Ghurye,[308] Karandikar,[309] Karve[310] and Kapadia[311] have done useful work in this field, but they have generally underplayed the role of socio-economic factors in the development of these institutions, giving more emphasis to ideational and cultural influences. Nevertheless, they have provided enough evidence to support the view that kinship usages and the institution of the family among the Vedic people have not remained static but have undergone significant changes. It is often charged that the early sociologists and Marxist historians worked within the framework of the nineteenth-century evolutionism. Yet evolutionary theory has been under attack more on account of its political implications than for the use of faulty data, and it is possible to modify the views of these scholars in the light of later researches without giving up the basic historical and evolutionary angle and without resorting to the method that explains away the vestiges of earlier forms as inexplicable 'historical accidents'. Evolutionary theory may need correction in specific details but the broad fact of evolution cannot be denied. Thus for instance, the philological evidence cited for postulating an earlier stage of promiscuity among the Ṛgvedic people may be reinterpreted in terms of not actual or potential *biological relationships, present or past*, but of ongoing social relationships which suggest collective functioning. If we agree that the kinship terminology of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* shows an evolution from a system which did not distinguish between relatives of different generations to a system which did,[312] the conclusion is inescapable that the earlier system reflects communal functioning, whereas in the latter we detect the emergence of the joint family with three or four generations living together, an institution which became the norm in later times. Later evolution of the patriarchal joint family among Vedic people is further supported by the evidence produced by K.M. Kapadia that in the *Ṛgveda* it is the common ancestors, collectively known as *pitṛs*, who are offered worship, whereas in the

Atharvaveda offering is made to an ancestor three generations away in the name of the *pitṛs* or manes.[313]

Further, the evidence of patrilineality and the desire for sons in the early portions of the *Ṛgveda* does not necessarily prove the existence of a patriarchal joint family at the time; the important point is to examine whether the desire was to add new members of a group,or to have private heirs and dependent workers as would be the case in a patriarchal family. In other words, the crux of the question is whether women's reproductive labour, like labour in production, were meant for social or for private ends. Hence the 'patriarchal' assumption[314] that sons were treated as items of property will have to be carefully re-examined as it has serious implications for the position of women and the familial structure and functioning of the early Ṛgvedic society. Relations of subordination are not likely to develop between father and son or between the sexes in a society in which the production unit is co-extensive with the consumption unit, and references of this kind are cited generally from the later books of the *Ṛgveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. The application of the term *dampati*, meaning the owner of the house, indiscriminately to both wife and husband, suggests an egalitarian society in which relations between the sexes were based on reciprocity and autonomy in their respective spheres of activity. The dependence of women is closely related with the growth of private property and the emergence of class which development ensured the withdrawal of women from 'public production to private household service'.[315]

Altekar's painstaking study of the problem does lead him to the view[316] that the participation of women in production (agriculture, manufacture of cloth, bows, arrows, etc.) was at the root of the freedom and better status of women in the Vedic age; their position began to decline when cheap 'forced' labour of the conquered population or of the śūdras became available. But his contention[317] that 'the introduction of the non-Aryan wife into the Aryan household is the key to the general deterioration of the position of women' (as the lawgivers, instead of making only the non-Aryan wife ineligible for Vedic studies and religious duties, made the whole class of women ineligible so that the husband who might be favouring the non-Aryan wife would not

be offended at the discrimination against her) is entirely hypothetical lacking in his usual discernment. Similarly, the lowering of the marriageable age of women and the discontinuance of their *upanayana* (initiation), which was essential for acquiring Vedic knowledge and thus for higher status, were obviously consequences of the deterioration of women's status; religio-juridical injunctions in this regard were merely reinforcing and trying to perpetuate the structural inequalities that had already developed.

In fact, most studies including that of Altekar approach the women's question almost entirely from the point of view of the upper castes. This could be partly due to the nature of the sources which, whether brahmanical or Buddhist or Jaina, have a distinct upper caste bias, but it is also partly because it has been assumed that the ideal was the norm and questions of gender equality were non-issues in the Indian context. Our sources provide ample evidence of the fact that in framing the rules of hypergamy and punishment for sexual offences brahmanical theory was heavily weighted in favour of upper caste men and ensured double exploitation of the female both on account of her gender as well as station in life: yet no serious study has been undertaken of these issues.

However, Altekar convincingly establishes that from 500 BC to roughly AD 1800 the story of women in India is that of a progressive decline and reduction to the status of śūdras.[318] The only redeeming feature was the improvement in their proprerty rights, especially in the case of widows. This point is noted by other writers[319] too and is generally explained either in terms of social reform, as is done by Altekar, or as an influence of Dravidian customs. But the possibility of a linkage with the growth of individual rights in land in an agrarian society has yet to be explored. Failure to do so makes writers regard changes in familial organization and the concept of individual property as completely irrational.[320] However, Yadava has argued[321] that the development of productive forces in the early centuries of the Christian era initiated a social process leading to the break-up of large family communities into small nuclear families, and this necessitated a change in the Dharmaśāstra law allowing the sons

to have the right to partition the ancestral land even if the father was unwilling. B.P. Mazumdar[322] shows that members of a brāhmaṇa family were not often given land in contiguous areas; this led to the splitting of the joint household making 'dents in the age-old concept of the joint family'. In my opinion the division of property among brothers, which practice replaced the earlier custom of the eldest brother inheriting the entire patrimony[323] and bearing the responsibility of maintaining the joint patriarchal household, weakened the ties with the recognition of the rights of close female relatives, especially the widow. A study of the changes in the kinship patterns and family organization of the upper classes as documented in the Dharmaśāstras and contemporary epigraphs could yield interesting results if the material background of the change is kept in view.

There is considerable literature on the brahmanic institution of *gotra*.[324] Kane informs us that the 'mass of material on *gotra* and *pravara* in the Sūtras, Purāṇas and digests is so vast and so full of contradictions that it is almost an impossible task to reduce it to order and coherence'.[325] *Gotra* is found in several place in the *Ṛgveda* but according to Kane, there is no positive indication that the word was used to denote 'descendants of a common patriarchal ancestor', although 'the conception underlying the idea of *gotra*' was then well known.[326] However, John Brough thinks that clan-exogamy may go back to the Indo-European period; it certainly existed in Ṛgvedic times and *gotras* were always exogamous.[327] This is contested by Irawati Karve[328] and in much greater detail by Ghurye, who re-emphasizes the thesis of S.V. Karandikar that brāhmaṇas borrowed *gotra* exogamy from the indigenous non-Aryan population and that Indo-Europeans did not practise clan-exogamy; even the Roman *gens* were not exogamous units.[329] Ghurye asserts that *gotras* as kin-units were formed around 800 BC in the age of the Brāhmaṇas and were stereotyped in the Sūtra period; *gotra* exogamy was 'a development of the household and family exogamy of the primitive Indo-Aryans in unison with the growth of ancestor worship and the use of surnames or family names'.[330] According to him, when the Indo-Aryan sages 'searched for their origins and thought of fixing their kin-units' they chose to classify brāhmaṇa families into eight

groups named after the seven stars of Urs Major (*saptarṣi*) and the bright star Canopus or Agastya. Thus the scheme originated in the cosmographical and astronomical view which the Aryans had acquired in their new home in the post-Atharvavedic times. This makes brahmanic *gotra* exogamy completely artificial and 'non-rational',[331] not only in modern times but even in its inception.

None the less, it is well known that archaic practices which have long lost any real significance continue to survive by virtue of their connection with some faith which still represents a living ideal. This would be especially noticeable in the case of a priestly caste, which is generally more tradition bound. According to Kosambi, the *gotra* system was rooted in joint property ownership.[332] In early Vedic times the term meant a 'cow-pen' or 'herd of cattle'. It was transferred to the group of people who were common owners of the herd. Later, when the unit of common holding became the joint patriarchal family, the *gotra* came to mean the family as well as the clan. In support, Kosambi quotes the Smṛti rule that in default of the immediate relatives of a deceased person, his property should pass on to the members of his *gotra*. In modern times the *gotra* no longer functions as a group in relation to property, but it still retains its collective function for ritual and ceremonial purposes.

The identification of *gotra* with 'clan' is questioned[333] on the basis of field observations that the brahmanic *gotra* is not a kin-group of any kind. In some brāhmaṇa communities, as for instance the Kashmiris, the *gotra* is acquired at the time of *upanayana* (initiation), whereas some other brāhmaṇa castes even allow marriage within the *gotra*.[334] Probably the key to the contradictions in the *gotra* system lies in the fact that here can be seen a remarkable example of the transformation of a structural phenomenon into a cultural one. Despite Ghurye's conclusion to the contrary, I have noticed earlier that his own evidence on the worship of the manes (as cited from Kapadia) shows that the worship of communal ancestors preceded the worship of the ancestors of individual families.[335] Hence the argument that the *gotra* system developed in harmony with ancestor worship indicates the direction of change from clan to patrilineal joint

family and not *vice versa*. D.C. Sircar has shown that[336] even as late as the fifth century a woman did not change her *gotra* upon marriage, it became the normal practice only later. The change reflects the transition from patrilineage to the patrilineal joint family system,[337] as the latter recruits members both through descent as well as marriage. This is significant from the point of view of the position of women in society, for it implies their abandonment of all rights in their own patrilineage, which itself is symbolic of the complete triumph of the patriarchal system. In course of time, *gotras* became symbols of high cultural status, empty of any structural significance, and were zealously retained by the brāhmaṇas as a means of establishing claims to ancient and pure ancestry. Although a number of learned disquisitions on this subject have brought to light a wealth of data, the process of change in the institution of the *gotra* has not received the attention it deserves.

It has been pointed out that apart from the neo-brāhmaṇas, many non-brāhmaṇa families and groups adopted traditional brahmanic *gotras* to gain prestige, and the *gotra* had become a useful tool of social mobility.[338] The possession of a brahmanic *gotra* in the age of the Buddha by an 'extended kin-group' such as the Mallas is interpreted as brahmanic influence.[339] However, the affiliation of non-brāhmaṇa communities to *gotras* named after eponymous sages may have been largely ornamental. According to anthropologists, clan exogamy was a widely prevalent feature of the Indian aboriginal population and it is quite likely that non-brāhmaṇa communities were also divided into a variety of exogamous units,[340] which are simply recorded as *gotras* or *laukika* (secular) *gotras* in our sources.[341] Just as new castes formed, new kin groups and clans could also grow; the course of their development would be influenced by corresponding conditions and necessities. Despite the general scarcity of documentary evidence, it may be possible to work out the structural development of certain better documented communities such as the Rajputs[342] and the Kāyasthas and arrive at interesting results.

A recent sociological study[343] has questioned the generally accepted Indological view that the patriarchal joint family was

the common norm. It shows that the higher and more Sanskritized castes place much greater emphasis on joint family households than the lower and less Sanskritized; and the joint family household is rare among untouchables. It follows that the patriarchal joint family existed only in a small section of the population; the majority lived in small households corresponding to the nuclear or elementary family. In my opinion the joint family system is closely linked with ownership of land or property in which all members have rights of one kind or the other. It is likely that in the lower castes and untouchables, among whom a man's sons move into separate houses after marriage, the pattern of the simple household based on nuclear families prevails chiefly on account of their being dependent on individual labour. Here the question of joint income does not arise. The lower incidence of the joint family or 'complex household' among the lower castes, therefore, may not be simply linked to the lack of Sanskritizing influence but also to the manner of subsistence. At any rate, the joint family system described in the Dharmaśāstras need not be looked upon merely as a patrilineal coparcenary or property-owning group or as a group which was united only for common family worship, at least in the period with which we are concerned. Generally speaking, this group must have had residential unity too, with its members living under one roof 'eating food cooked at one hearth'. The separation of the 'simple household' from the 'complex household' is usually a transitional stage in the break-up of a joint family. Thus historians and Indologists do not seem to have been wrong in adhering to a composite definition of the joint family and regarding it as a multi-functional unit. The error lies in inadequate emphasis on the relationship of this type of family structure with the ownership of property, and the possibility of its absence among those who did not have landed property and did not earn their living through joint enterprise.

The influence of sociology has stimulated the historical study of ancient kinship usages in recent years. This has led to a re-examination of a number of stereotypes as well as search for new data. It is argued[344] that the earlier generation of scholars discovered traces of cross-cousin marriage in ancient north India

owing to their perspective of nineteenth-century evolutionism; but their interpretation of data was faulty. References to cross-cousin marriages quoted in this context from the epics, Purāṇas and other texts may be explained on the basis of the fact that these texts were either composed or redacted in south India or Sri Lanka where the Dravidian kinship system prevailed. However, in spite of these scholarly attempts it is not possible to brush aside all the evidence of matrilineal descent and cross-cousin marriage—which is generally associated with the former—in some regions of the north. A passage of the *Mahābhārata* shows[345] that property in the Madra country[346] passed on to sisters and not to sons; and the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* and the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* speak of the prevalence of promiscuous relations and *strīrājya* among the people of Madra, Bāhlīka and Gāndhāra. It is possible that the authors of these texts, imbued as they were with a patriarchal outlook, looked on the matrilineal customs as relations of promiscuity. It is difficult to interpret these references which relate specifically to northern localities as a southern influence. It is suggested that some areas of northern India may have been under 'possible Dravidian influence'[347] in an earlier period, which could explain references to cross-cousin marriages. Modern anthropologists are of the view that matriliny is a stage of 'specific' evolution and not of 'general' evolution.[348] It is generally accepted that the gentile organization was characteristic of a certain stage in general social evolution, but whether the *gens* were structured matrilineally or patrilineally depended upon technology, division of labour, organization of work groups, control of resources, types of subsistence activities, etc.[349] However, the use of metronymics in the case of the first thirty-six Vedic teachers mentioned in the succession lists[350] of the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads has been recently interpreted as an indication of the prevalence of polyandry among the highest and the most orthodox of the Vedic population.[351] A strong case is made for the existence of polyandry among Vedic Aryans and some other Indo-European communities and it is argued that the practice was rooted in socio-economic needs. It fell into desuetude in a changed material milieu and was condemned by later moralists. But the Khasas, the

descendants of the Aryans in the backward Himalayan regions, still practise it.

As E.H. Carr puts it, history 'is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts'.[353] Historical problems can hardly be solved by replacing one stereotype with another without a simultaneous 'dialogue with facts and more facts'. While there is no denying that what can be attempted by a student of history is largely determined by the range of the source material the picture derived from documents may be collated and even supplemented with field-data, provided that necessary caution is exercised against the tendency to foist on the past comparatively recent developments. I would also argue that while underscoring the interdisciplinary approach we must beware of uncritical acceptance of sociological models which may have some validity for contemporary society but may not be applied to earlier periods with equal justification. For example, when we use the concept of Sanskritization for the early period of Indian history we should be aware of the fact that the concept gives excessive emphasis to ritual or cultural emulation and minimizes the importance of politico-economic factors, although in the ultimate analysis it is the latter which provide the frame within which Sanskritization operates, at least in pre-British times. R.D. Sanwal has shown[353] in the case of Kumaon—and M.N. Srinivas who defined and popularized the term agrees with him—that the regulation and assignment of status to groups or even individuals by the state through the post of *dharmādhikārī* was the 'lynch-pin' of the caste hierarchy. Once the system broke down as a result of the British conquest of Kumaon, the ritual basis of caste gained primacy over 'criteria of political privilege' and secular mobility could not be legitimized through state action but had to resort to purely ritual channels such as the Sanskritization of lifestyle. It appears that Kumaon was not atypical. The post of *dharmādhikārī* existed in a number of regions,[354] especially in the peripheral areas where the caste hierarchy was still fluid. Instances are not wanting to show that political authority was expected to settle disputes regarding caste status; the king could excommunicate, upgrade or downgrade an individual or group in the hierarchy. The custom was so well

established that occasionally even Muslim rulers had to perform such tasks.[355] It is in this sense that one should view the frequently expressed concern of early medieval rulers with the maintenance and regulation of the varṇa order. Social institutions of early India may have been given a ritual language, but they originated in and were sustained by secular and politico-economic factors.

NOTES

1 M.N. Srinivas and others, 'Caste: A Trend Report and Bibliography', *Current Sociology*, VIII, Pt 3 (1959), pp. 135-83; R.S. Sharma, 'Historiography of the Ancient Indian Social Order', *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy* (Mumbai, 1966), pp. 1-18; Romila Thapar, 'Interpretations of Ancient Indian History', *History and Theory*, VII, Pt 3 (1968), pp. 318-35; Barrie M. Morrison, 'Sources, Methods and Concepts in Early Indian History', *Pacific Affairs*, XLI, Pt 1 (September 1968), pp. 71-85.

2 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in the Social Structure of the Early Tamils' in R.S. Sharma and V. Jha, eds., *Indian Society: Historical Probings (In Memory of D.D. Kosambi)* (hereafter *Historical Probings*) (Delhi, 1974), pp. 124-55.

3 For an interesting critique of the Western perceptions of caste, see Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Delhi, 1970), pp. 21-33. Dumont calls them 'ethnocentric', springing from the egalitarian world-view of the Western civilization. However, as G.D. Berreman remarks, Dumont's own interpretation, based as it is on highly selective data, is no less ethnocentric and deeply influenced by the French intellectual tradition, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, No. V (December 1971), pp. 16-23. Also see Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), Chap. 2.

4 J.C. Nesfield, *A Brief View of the Caste system of the North-West Provinces and Oudh* (Allahabad, 1855).

5 H.H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Anthropometric Data* (Calcutta, 1981); idem, *The People of India* (London, 1908).

6 Celestin Bougle, *Essays on the Caste System*, tr. D.F. Pocock (London, 1971).

7 Ibid., pp. 30-2.

8 Ibid., p. 38.

9 S.N. Ketkar, *History of Caste in India*, 2 vols (London, 1911).

10 D. Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Lahore, 1916).

11 J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (Cambridge, 1946), Chap. XI.
12 Ibid., p. 156.
13 Ibid., pp. 164f.
14 R.D. Sanwal, *Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon* (Delhi, 1976), p. 5.
15 D.F. Pocock, Preface to Celestine Bougle's *Essays on the Caste System*, p. ix.
16 Louis Dumont, op. cit., p. 35.
17 Louis Dumont and D.F. Pocock, 'For A Sociology of India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 1 (Paris and The Hague, 1957).
18 E.J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', *Deadalus* (Winter 1971; rpt., The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1971), p. 8.
19 E.H. Carr, *What is History* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 132.
20 *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 66.
21 *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, No. V (December 1971), p. 78.
22 *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 218.
23 Ibid., n. 111b.
24 Ibid., p. 232; n. 112b.
25 Ibid., p. 228. In a note (112e) Dumont admits that the available evidence suggests that 'what used to be the caste system with a religious basis is tending to become a collection of closed grouping corresponding to modern ideas of social stratification'.
26 What F. Engels says regarding monogamy is perhaps no less applicable to endogamy. This form of marriage arose out of property relationships—women themselves being a form of property—and the dominance of men. 'Thus, full freedom in marriage can become generally operative only when the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, and of the property relations created by it, has removed all those secondary economic considerations which still exert so powerful an influence on the choice of a partner.' F. Engels in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow, 1970), pp. 253-4.
27 Ibid., p. 237.
28 *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, No. V (December 1971), pp. 16f.
29 P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, Pt 1 (Pune, 1941), p. 22, fn. 51; also see Preface, pp. ii-iii.
30 P.A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility* (New York, 1959), p. 531.

31 Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Culture and Society in India* (Calcutta, 1967); idem, *Man in India*, LI (December 1971), pp. 400f.
32 Cf. J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India* (London, 1968), p. 182.
33 E.J. Hobsbawm, op. cit., p. 2.
34 R.S. Sharma, op. cit., pp. 5-6; Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 28; Suvira Jaiswal, op. cit., pp. 126-7; S.C. Malik, *Indian Civilization: The Formative Period* (Simla, 1968), p. 106.
35 R.P. Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races: A Study of the Indo-Aryan People and Institutions* (Rajshahi, 1916).
36 N.K. Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1931).
37 D.N. Majumdar, *Races and Cultures of India* (Lucknow, 1944; rpt., Mumbai, 1958).
38 G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India* (Mumbai, 1957). This is the revised edition of *Caste and Race in India*, published 1932. Also see his 'Ethnic Theory of Caste', *Man in India*, IV (1924), pp. 209-71.
39 For example, Sandhya Mukerjee reiterates the views of R.P. Chanda without making any attempt at collating them with archaeological and literary evidence produced since his time, *Some Aspects of Social Life in Ancient India (325 B.C.–A.D. 200)* (Allahabad, 1976).
40 Suvira Jaiswal, op. cit., pp. 126-7; B.S. Guha, 'An Outline of the Racial Ethnology of India' in *An Outline of the Field Sciences of India* (Calcutta, 1937), p.129.
41 D.N. Majumdar,'The Racial Basis of Indian Social Structure', *The Eastern Anthropologist*, II, No. 3 (Lucknow, September 1948), pp. 145-52.
42 P.C. Chaudhuri, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* (Guwahati, 1959), pp. 106f, 337.
43 Suvira Jaiswal, op. cit.
44 'On the Translation of the Varṇa', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (hereafter *JESHO*), VII (1964), pp. 196-201.
45 Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York, 1968).
46 M.N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Mumbai, 1970), pp. 63-9.
47 Op. cit., p. 197. It has the merit of concurrence with a similar general statement made by A.L. Basham in *The Wonder That Was India* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 149.

48 V.S. Agrawala, *India As Known to Pāṇini* (Lucknow, 1953), pp. 15, 91f.

49 Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India As Seen in the Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira* (Varanasi, 1969), p. 192.

50 P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, Pt 1 (Pune, 1941), p. 55.

51 Narendra Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Mumbai, 1966), pp. 122f.

52 D.C. Sircar, *Society and Administration in Ancient and Medieval India*, I (Calcutta, 1967), pp. 103-5.

53 Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Social Life in Ancient India (In the Background of the Yājñavalkyasmṛti)* (Calcutta, 1965), p. 25.

54 Dumont thinks it wrong to assume that in the varṇas 'heredity is more important than function, which is true of caste but not of varṇas', and that it is the wrong concept of varṇa which prevails today, even among anthropologists (*Homo Hierarchicus*, pp. 73-4). However, we may point out that even in the later Vedic age membership of any of the four varṇas was theoretically dependent on birth (Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, Pt 1, p. 48) and in the early Buddhist literature the hereditary basis of varṇa is taken for granted, even though the Buddha tried hard to refute it. Dumont criticizes those who regard accession to the dignity of the kṣatriyas by dynasties of a different origin as an 'irregularity' and who say that true kṣatriyas have been long extinct; for in his view kṣatriyahood depended on function and not heredity. Yet he ignores the fact that the rise to kṣatriya status of people of unknown origin was itself dependent on their achieving putative hereditary links with the older kṣatriyas through invented genealogies, and those who did not seek such validation continued as members of the lower varṇas (for example, Harṣavardhana of Kannauj and the Reḍḍy Kings of Andhra). In practice as well as in theory, therefore, heredity was no less important than function in the varṇa concept, as it evolved in a society where heredity was an important factor in the division of labour. The contradiction in Dumont is due to his methodology of building different models of caste and varṇa in accordance with a preconceived theory.

55 Pushpa Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 55.

56 Cf. S.J. Tambiah, 'From Varṇa to Caste through Mixed Unions' in Jack Goody, ed., *Character of Kinship* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 191f. Also see F.A. Margilin, 'Power, Purity and Pollution: Aspects of the Caste System Reconsidered', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s.; Vol. 11, No. 2 (1977), pp. 245-70.

57 Adrian C. Meyer, 'The Indian Caste System' in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, II (New York, 1968, rpt., 1972), p. 340.
58 Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India* (London, 1965, 3rd edn., Mumbai 1966), p. 7.
59 Karve, *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* (Pune, 2nd edn., 1968), p. 55.
60 *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (hereafter *PIHC*), 31st Session (Varanasi, 1969), pp. 21f.
61 Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice* (Delhi, 1975), p. 29.
62 *PIHC* (1969), p. 36. The suggestion seems to have been originally made by A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 18.
63 S.C. Malik, *Indian Civilization: The Formative Period*, pp. 59, 100f.
64 *The Pre-Industrial City: Past and Present* (New York, 1965), pp. 100f.
65 S.C. Malik, op. cit., pp. 105f.
66 Ibid., p. 146.
67 A. Ghosh, *The City in Early India* (Simla, 1973), Chap. VI; R.S. Sharma, 'Iron and Urbanization in the Ganga Basin', *IHR*, Vol. I, No. 1 (March 1974), pp. 98-103.
68 Infra. pp. 74-5; also notes 227 and 228 below.
69 W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System* (Lucknow, 1936; rpt., 1958).
70 Ibid., p. xii.
71 R.S. Sharma points out ('Indian Feudalism Retouched', *IHR*, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1974, p. 326, fn. 2), that it is only for the priest and the barber that the peasant-client is a *jajmāna*. The extension of this term to include other service relationships is not quite justified. Also see Claude Meillassoux, 'Are There Castes in India?' *Economy and Society*, Vol. II (1973), pp. 102f. In fact the very notion of *jajmani* system regulating the relationship between artisans and the *jajmāna* upper caste families in traditional village society has been questioned and it is shown that the *jajmānī* theory is applicable only to family priests. Artisans, the traditional twelve *balutas* in a Maharashtrian village, were servants providing 'demiurgical labour' rather than *jajmani*. H. Fukazawa, 'Rural Servants in the Eighteenth Century Maharashtrian Village—Demiurgic or Jajmani System', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (1972), pp. 14-40; Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History, Towards a Marxist Perception* (Delhi, 1995), pp. 170-1.

72 N. Wagle, op. cit., p. 131. For the use of the term *jātivāda* in the sense of 'the theory of *jāti*' in the Pali texts, p. 122.
73 Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization* (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 324-5.
74 *Homo Hierarchicus*, pp. 71, 148. Basham also thinks that castes developed later than the varṇas (op. cit., p. 150).
75 *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (hereafter *ISIH)* (Mumbai, 1956), p. 93.
76 Suvira Jaiswal, Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, Indian History Congress, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977).
77 *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (hereafter *Culture*) (London, 1965), p. 51.
78 'On the Origin of the Brahmin Gotras', *JBBRAS*, XXVI (1950), p. 50.
79 *ISIH*, p. 79.
80 *Culture*, p. 51 (emphasis added). In opposition to this well-known Marxist view which explains the origin of antagonistic classes from among the members of the same community as a result of the development of productive forces and the emergence of surplus, Romila Thapar suggests an alternative hypothesis which seems to make conquest or force the primary factor in the development of the varṇa/class system. Thus she writes that 'the original references to the *rājanyas* and kṣatriyas may not have been to such groups within each tribe, but to an entire tribe which was referred to by either of these names', and 'the terms *rājanya* (and later kṣatriya) and śudra are either tribal names or words qualifying a category of tribes (Romila Thapar, 'Social Mobility in Ancient India with Special Reference to Elite Groups', *Historical Probings*, pp. 101-2; reprinted in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Delhi, 1978, pp. 128-9). This leaves out only brāhmaṇas and vaiśyas who are said to be 'people with particular vocations—the special priesthood in the one case, the commoners of the tribe given to agriculture and trade in the other'. She does not explain whether these tribes whose 'commoners' were known as vaiśyas had higher ranking sections too, and if so, how these were known. In my opinion, the existence of some oligarchical 'clans' or 'tribes' claiming *rājanya* or kṣatriya status in the age of the Buddha and later does not prove that these terms denoted specific tribes at the outset. The term *rājanya* occurs only once in the *Ṛgveda* in the *puruṣasūkta* hymn; but *rājan*, from which the former is derived, is mentioned a number of times in the

plural in the sense of tribal chiefs. The term *kṣatra* is used in the sense of valour and is also applied to the gods. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, rājanya* stands for a member of the second varṇa and kṣatriya for a king (P.V. Kane, op. cit., II, Pt 1, pp. 30-2). Large extended kin groups of *rājanyas* came to be formed in the later Vedic age cutting across tribal lines. We have evidence of a number of tribes coalescing in later Vedic times and of the emergence of territorial kingdoms with a varṇa structure. In the later Vedic royal consecration ceremony the *janyamitra*, the ruler-ally from a different tribe, has a specific role to play. According to Heesterman, the *janyamitra* was a relative by marriage, and in the *White Yajurveda* the term is replaced by *mitrarājanya* (J. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, The Hague, 1957, pp. 114f). A network of alliances was essential for the rising nobility of the tribal kingdoms. Hence the *janyamitra* had a prominent place in the *saptāṅga* theory of later Vedic times. Later, powerful tribes which could establish their political dominance over the local population were also given the kṣatriya or *rājanya* status and the process continued well into the early medieval period.

81 *Journal of American Oriental Society*, LXXV, pp. 235f, fn. 20.

82 Ibid.

83 See his sound but scathing criticism of S.A. Dange's *India from Primitive Communism to Slavery* (Mumbai, 1949), published in the *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* (Pune, 1949), pp. 271-7.

84 *Culture*, p. 23. Recently B.N.S. Yadava has examined certain textual passages suggesting the transformation of slaves into dependent workers approximating more or less to the position of serfs, and he argues that the decline and diminution of slavery was one of the trends leading to the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages in India. Yadava has to admit nevertheless that 'the institution was never a major factor in the system of production in ancient India' even as it was 'by no means negligible'. Refer to 'The Accounts of the Kali Age and the Social Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages', *IHR*, Vol. V, Nos. 102 (1978-9), pp. 34f.

85 Devraj Chanana, *Slavery in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1960).

86 *Śūdras in Ancient India* (hereafter *Śūdras*) (Delhi, 1st edn., 1958; 2nd edn., Delhi, 1980). Unless specified otherwise references are to the first edition), pp. 194f.

87 Eleanor B. Leacock in her Introduction to F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London, 1972, rpt., 1977), pp. 53-4.

88 *ISIH*, p. 93; *Culture*, p. 86.
89 *ISIH*, p. 104.
90 R.S. Sharma, 'Conflict, Distribution and Differentiation in Ṛgvedic Society', *PIHC*, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977), pp. 177-91.
91 Kane, op. cit., II, Pt 1, 181; Jogiraj Basu, *India in the Age of Brāhmaṇas* (Calcutta, 1969), p. 11, *Cambridge History of India*, i, p. 85.
92 Jogiraj Basu, op. cit., pp. 29-31; S.A. Dange, *Cultural Sources from the Veda* (Mumbai, 1977), p. 55.
93 'Class Formation and Its Material Basis in the Upper Gangetic Basin (1000-500 B.C.)', *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1 (July 1975), pp. 1f.
94 *Indian Feudalism: c.300-1200 A.D.* (University of Calcutta, 1965); *Social Changes in Early Medieval India (circa A.D. 500-1200)*, The First Devraj Chanana Memorial Lecture (hereafter *Social Changes* (Delhi, 1969).
95 'Problems of Social Formation in Early India', Presidential Address, *PIHC*, 36th Session (Aligarh, 1975), p. 8.
96 Wagle, op. cit., p. 35, passim.
97 Thus R.N. Mehta (*Pre-Buddhist India*, Mumbai, 1939) wrote that the ordinary people did not worry about the caste of an individual, and economic considerations were always in the forefront (p. 265). He stated that he was chiefly interested in the class structure of the times (p. 245); but this does not emerge clearly in his writings. Also, his use of the entire body of the Jātaka literature for a period prior to the sixth century BC can be hardly justified.
98 *Social and Rural Economy of Northern India* (2 vols, 1st edn., 1942-6; Calcutta, 2nd edn., 1961-7), II, 276.
99 Ibid., pp. 254-5.
100 B.N. Dutta, *Studies in Indian Social Polity* (Calcutta, 1944); *Dialectics of Hindu Ritualism* (Calcutta, 1952).
101 *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (hereafter *SCNI*) (Allahabad, 1973); 'Immobility and Subjection of Indian Peasantry in Early Medieval Complex', *IHR*, Vol. I, No. 1 (March 1974), pp. 18-27; 'Problems of the Interaction Between Socio-Economic Classes in the Early Medieval Complex', *IHR*, Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), pp. 43-58.
102 'Some Aspects of the Changing Order in India during the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa Age' in G.R. Sharma, ed., *Kuṣāṇa Studies* (Allahabad, 1968), pp. 75-97.
103 D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphic Records* (Lucknow, 1969).
104 Harbans Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?',

Presidential Address to Medieval India Section, Indian History Congress (Waltair, 1979).

105 For example, the use of such universal categories as 'hunting and gathering', 'food-producing' or 'horticultural society' and so on. It is wrong to contend as Mukhia does that to identify a pre-capitalist formation in terms of a universal category is to identify it as a world system in the sense that capitalism is a world system drawing the whole world within its nexus. The use of universal categories to analyse specific societies is made with a view to establishing the universal character of the laws of their development in contrast to the so-called 'historical' school which emphasizes the uniqueness of each people's history, thus denying the existence of any objective laws of development. For that matter even the capitalist mode of production has its specific peculiarities in different countries. According to Bottomore the epochs of socio-economic formation outlined by Marx and Engels constitute the major types and within each of these it is possible to distinguish a number of subtypes. Thus European Feudalism and Japan from the eleventh to the nineteenth century constitute two different subtypes of feudalism. Within capitalism Bottomore notes 'early liberal competitive capitalism and later oligopolistic capitalism characterized by the pre-eminence of large corporations' as different subtypes (*Sociology: A Guide to Problems and Literature*, London, 1969, p. 116).

Mukhia regards the application of the model of feudalism to the early medieval society as Eurocentric. This is a double-edged argument which cuts bothways. It may equally be said that to regard European developments as exceptional and unique is Eurocentric.

For discussion on the debate, T.J. Byres and Harbans Mukhia, eds., *Feudalism and Non-European Societies* (special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 12, Nos. 2-3, London, 1985); D.N. Jha, ed., *Feudal Social Formation in Early India* (Delhi, 1987); B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994), Introduction.

106 Susobhan Sarkar, General President's Address, *PIHC* (Muzaffarpur, 1972), pp. 7-10; D.N. Jha, 'Early Indian Feudalism: A Historiographical Critique', Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, *PIHC* (Waltair, 1979). In an important study Tarafdar has shown that the existence of trade and a currency system do not at all negate the prevalence of an agrarian feudal economy as reflected

in the land grants. The kind of commercial activities we find in certain regions of the early medieval period were incapable of generating a process of urbanization and creating a 'stable commercialized middle class'. The profits from trade were either taken away by foreign merchants or frittered away by feudal lords giving no incentive to artisans who were attached to feudal or religious establishments with little scope for mobility. See M.R. Tarafdar, 'Trade and Society in Early Medieval Bengal', *IHR*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 274-86.

107 H. Mukhia, op. cit., p. 31.

108 Karl Marx, *Capital*, III (Moscow, 1977), p. 790.

109 'Problem of the Interaction Between Socio-Economic Classes', *IHR*, Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), p. 48.

110 Marx regarded sharecropping as a transitory form between the original form of rent and the capitalist rent (op. cit., p. 803). Sharecropping flourishing in a natural economy may be compared to the payment of rent in kind. The sharecropper is the direct producer notwithstanding his juridical position. His entire labour-surplus is received by the landlord in the form of the natural product; and his labour for himself and his labour for the landlord are not separated by time and space.

111 Dharma Kumar, 'Caste and Landlessness in South India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IV, 1961-2, pp. 337-63.

112 *Parāśarasmṛti*, Chowkhamba edn. (Varanasi, 1968), XI.22, p. 25.

113 s.v. *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* by D.C. Sircar (Delhi, 1966).

114 *Parāśarasmṛti*, II, 2f, II. 8

115 However, some pioneering work has been done in recent years to focus on class contradictions and peasant struggles. See David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, 1985); R.S. Sharma, 'Peasant Protest in Early Medieval India', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 16, No. 9 (September 1988), pp. 1-16.

116 S.C. Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society: From c. 2nd Century B.C. to c. 4th Century A.D.* (Calcutta, 1978), pp. 231f.

117 Romila Thapar, 'Social Mobility in Ancient India with Special Reference to Elite Groups', in *Historical Probings*, p. 203; reprinted in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 129. This remark ignores the fact that the attempt to improve ritual status could hardly be made until a change in 'actual status' had occurred. Later, it is added in the same passage that the non-Dharmaśāstra sources indicate that 'in terms of actual status there was mobility'.

The article is full of contradictory statements. It is said, 'Members of the brāhmaṇa group because of their ritual status would automatically be a part of the elite *irrespective of their economic status*' (ibid., p. 127; emphasis added). But the same paragraph continues: 'non-brahmanical literature does however refer to impoverished brāhmaṇas in the early part of our period. It would seem therefore that ritual status was not sufficient for membership of the elite'. The confusion may be partly due to the lack of a clear definition of the category of 'elite' which is sought to be analysed.

118 S.C. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. viii; Dasharath Sharma, *Rajasthan Through the Ages*, Vol. I (Bikaner, 1966), pp. 528f; Brijendra Nath Sharma, *Social and Cultural History of Northern India c.1000-1200 A.D.* (New Delhi, 1972), p. 1.

119 Dasharath Sharma, op. cit., pp. 444, 535; B.N. Sharma, op. cit., p. 9; Kailash Chand Jain, *Malwa Through the Ages, From the Earliest Times to 1305 A.D.* (Delhi, 1972), p. 482; R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Struggle for Empire*, 2nd edn. (Mumbai, 1966), p. 498. B.N.S. Yadava is aware of the fact that a 'contracting economy with its emphasis on agrarian and local character' was reflected in the growing rigidity of caste. Nevertheless, he repeats the views of A.L. Srivastava and holds that the growing power of Muslims was a 'contributory factor' to the growth of the rigidity of caste rules (*SCNI*, pp. 6-7, 61).

120 For example, an inscription from Dharwad district of the time of Satyāśraya Cālukya and dated in Śaka Era 929, speaks of the Coḷa king Rājarāja I as one 'who has ravaged the whole country perpetrating murders of women, children and brāhmaṇas, seizing women and overthrowing the order of caste' (*jātināśa*), *EI*, XVI, No. 11A. Rājarāja himself is known to have built the famous temple of Tanjore and performed the *tulābhāra* ceremony, making abundant gifts to brāhmaṇas.

121 For example, P.L. Bhargava, *India in the Vedic Age* (Lucknow, 1971); M.M. Singh, *Life in North-Eastern India in pre-Mauryan Times* (Varanasi, 1967); B.N. Puri, *India Under the Kuṣāṇas* (Calcutta, 1963); R.N. Saletore, *Life in the Gupta Age* (Mumbai, 1943); Brij Narayan Sharma, *Social Life in Northern India: A.D. 600-1000* (Delhi, 1966); Brijendra Nath Sharma, *Social and Cultural History of Northern India, c.1000-1200 A.D.* (New Delhi,1972). Also see the works of Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, Sandhya Mukerjee and Sibesh Bhattacharya mentioned above. B.P. Mazumdar's *Socio-Economic History of Northern India (from*

A.D.1030 to 1194) (Calcutta, 1960) contains much useful material. Besides these we may mention the chapters on social conditions in *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vols. I-V, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and edited by R.C. Majumdar. Also see K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II (Calcutta, 1957).

122 See Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1940); P.C. Chaudhury, op. cit., Dasharath Sharma, op. cit.; Kailash Chand Jain, op. cit. Also R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I (Dhaka, 1943); G. Yazdani, *The Early History of the Deccan*, Vols. I and II (London, 1960); R.R. Diwakar, ed., *Bihar Through the Ages* (Chennai, 1958); Anantalal Thakur, ed., *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. I, Pts 1 and 2 (Patna, 1974).

123 We have already referred to some interpretations of the Buddhist material. To quote some earlier writings, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India* (London, 1903); R. Fick, *The Social Organisation in North-East India in Buddha's Time* translated into English by S.K. Maitra (Calcutta, 1920). For Jain sources, see J.C. Jain, *Life in Ancient India As Depicted in the Jain Canons* (Mumbai, 1947). For studies of individual branches of brahmanical literature, see for example Ramgopal, *India of Vedic Kalpasūtras* (Delhi, 1983). This list is not exhaustive.

124 A.D. Pusalker, *Bhāsa: A Study* (Lahore, 1940); B.S. Upadhyaya, *India in Kālidāsa* (Allahabad, 1947); V.S. Agrawala, *India As Known to Pāṇini* (Lucknow, 1953); idem, *Harṣacarita: Eka Sāṃskṛtika Adhyayana* (Patna, 1953); idem, *Kādambarī: Eka Sāṃskṛtika Adhyayana* (Varanasi, 1958); idem, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa: Eka Sāṃskṛtika Adhyayana* (Allahabad, 1961); idem, *India As Described by Manu* (Varanasi, 1970); A.B.L. Avasthi, *Studies in Skanda Purāṇa*, Pt. 1 (Lucknow, 1965); K.K. Handiqui, *Yaśastilaka and Indian Culture*, Jīvarāja Jaina Granthamālā, No. 2 (Sholapur, 1949); B.N. Puri, *India in the Time of Patañjali* (Mumbai, 1957); Sarvananda Pathak, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa kā Bhārata* (Varanasi, 1967); Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India As Seen in the Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira*; idem, *India As Seen in the Kuṭṭanīmata of Dāmodaragupta* (Delhi, 1975); D.K. Gupta, *Society and Culture in the Time of Daṇḍin* (Delhi, 1972); Jhinku Yadav, *Samaraiccakahā: Eka Sāmskṛtika Adhyayana* (Varanasi, 1977). Similar studies have been made of a number of other texts.

125 'Dāna and Dakṣiṇā As Forms of Exchange', *Indica*, XIII, Nos. 1 and 2 (1976), pp. 37-48.

126 B.P. Mazumdar, *Socio-Economic History of Northern India*, p. 77.

127 *Manusmṛti*, III.151-2, 154, 164.

128 Ibid., VII.58, VIII.9-10; *Agni Purāṇa*, CCXX.1-6; *Matsya Purāṇa*, CCXV.8-10. A.S. Altekar observes that the injunctions of the Smṛtis against brāhmaṇas going into employment perhaps had 'non-governmental' service in view. See his *Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Their Times* (Pune, 2nd edn., 1967), pp. 325-6.

129 M.N. Srinivas, Introduction in R.D. Sanwal, *Social Stratification in Rural Kumaon*; B.N.Saraswati, *Brahmanic Ritual Traditions in the Crucible of Time* (Simla, 1977), pp. 39, 73-4.

130 V.V. Mirashi, ed., *CII*, IV, ii, No. 123, p. 629, line 17.

131 R.D. Sanwal, op. cit., pp. 112-13.

132 G. Pfeffer, 'Puri's Vedic Brahmins: Continuity and Change in their Traditional Institutions' in Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi, eds., *The Cult of Jagannātha and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (Delhi, 1978), pp. 421-37.

133 Ibid., pp. 425f.

134 Hermann Kulke, 'Royal Temple Policy and the Structure of Medieval Hindu Kingdoms', ibid., pp. 125f; Pfeffer, op. cit.

135 For a similar role of brāhmaṇas in the Tamil country in checking the power of the *nāḍus*, see Richard S. Kennedy, 'The King in Early South India As Chieftain and Emperor', *IHR*, Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), p. 11.

136 B.P. Mazumdar argues that in the early medieval period in Assam, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh kings sometimes tried to protect the frontiers of their kingdoms by settling brāhmaṇas in disputed and vulnerable areas. Hence land grants were made collectively to groups of brāhmaṇas. See 'Significance of Collective Land Grants', *PIHC* (Bhagalpur, 1968), pp. 64-72.

137 B.N. Saraswati, op. cit., Chap. II.

138 For the growth of territorial subdivisions among brāhmaṇas and other high castes, see R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes*, pp. 13f.

139 For example, *Brāhmaṇotpattimārtaṇḍa* discussed by B.N. Saraswati, op. cit., pp. 218-19; *Dharmāraṇya Purāṇa* discussed by Veena Das, *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 18f.

140 Max Weber, *Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 62. He refers to the priests of the Paria tribes and of the artisan castes such as the Kammāḷars.

141 *Skanda Purāṇa*, Sahyādri Khanda, Uttarārdha, I.35. For legends

explaining the low rank of the priest families of the Mishmi, Abor, Dafala and Miri tribes with reference to a curse of Paraśurāma, see N.N. Vasu, *Social History of Kamarupa*, I, quoted in P.C. Choudhury, op. cit., p. 103. For Paraśurāma settling the brāhmaṇas near the present Paraśurāma-kuṇḍa in Assam, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kāmarūpa* (Shillong, 1933), pp. 22-3.

142 *EI*, VIII, No. 24; No. 1; XXXI, No. 2.

143 E. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. I (Chennai, 1909), p. 183.

144 R.N. Nandi, 'The Boyas: Transformation of A Tribe into Caste', *PIHC* (Bhagalpur, 1968), pp. 97f.

145 Ibid., pp. 101-2.

146 For the disintegration of the Ābhīra tribe into Ābhīra brāhmaṇas, Ābhīra kṣatriyas and Ābhīra śūdras, see B. Suryavanshi, *The Ābhīras: Their History and Culture* (Vadodara, 1962), pp. 39f.

147 D.D. Kosambi, 'The Basis of Ancient Indian History' (I), *JAOS*, LXXV, No. 1 (1955), 44; V. Jha, 'Varṇasaṃkara in the Dharmasūtras: Theory and Practice', *JESHO*, XIII, Pt 3 (1970), p. 284. A Śaka devotee of Buddhism, *upāsaka* Ayitulu, calls himself a 'bammhana' (=brāhmaṇa) in an inscription at Kuḍā. See K. Satyanarayana, *A Study of the History and Culture of the Andhras*, Vol. I (*From Stone Age to Feudalism*) (Delhi, 1975), p. 165.

148 *EI*, VIII, No. 5.

149 R.N. Nandi, 'Clan Name and Social Mobility in the Deccan', *PIHC*, 33rd Session (Muzaffarpur, 1972), pp. 111f.

150 For an excellent exposition of the process, see R.D. Sanwal, op. cit. Sanwal has shown that the present Chauthani brāhmaṇa subcaste, which was formed through the intermixture of immigrant families of various brāhmaṇa subcastes, used political power to control basic economic resources and imposed inferior ritual-legal status on people who did not have political power 'in order to secure social, economic and ritual prestige and privileges for themselves' (p. 184). Thus, Chauthanis are high ranking brāhmaṇas; but the Nambudiris, who are traditionally regarded as Vedic brāhmaṇas and migrated to Kumaon to act as priests in the temples believed to have been founded by Śaṅkarācārya, are regarded as having the same social status as the Khasis, who approximate to the level of clean śūdras.

151 R.N. Nandi, 'Some Social Aspects of the Gṛhyasūtras', *PIHC*, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977), pp. 167-77.

152 Suvira Jaiswal, *PIHC*, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977), pp. 33f.

153 Max Weber, op. cit., p. 58.
154 S.J. Tambiah, op. cit., p. 208.
155 Thus, among the Bhumij, the priests of their guardian goddess Koṭeśvarī belong to the Gulgu clan which has also given rise to the Raj family of Barabhum; Surajit Sinha, 'State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India' in *Man in India*, XLII, No. 1 (1962), pp. 35-80.
156 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Origin of the Rajputs: The Political, Economic and Social Processes in Early Medieval Rajasthan', *IHR*, Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), p. 69.
157 D.R. Bhandarkar has also suggested the probability of the absorption of the priestly class of some foreign tribes as kṣatriyas, 'Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population' (hereafter 'Foreign Elements'), *IA*, Vol. XI, rpt. (Calcutta, 1968), p. 26.
158 For example, the Kaḷacūri kings traced their origin from the creator-god Brahmā to Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna, the founder of the Haihaya dynasty. The Rāṣṭrakūṭas claimed descent from Yadu and Sātyaki, J.N. Asopa, *Origin of the Rajputs* (Delhi, 1976), pp. 172, 194. Mārtaṇḍa, a feudal chief of the Pallava king Nṛpatuṅgavarman, described as 'the great chief of Vesali family' in the Bahur plates, claimed to be a descendant of the Kurus of epic fame (Bahur plates, verse 18, *EI*, XVIII, No. 2). But not much earlier an official of Nandivarman Pallava, Brahmaśrīrāja, was described as 'one who possessed the full and unshakable splendour of the brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya castes' (Kaṣakudi plates, *SII*, III, 350-1). Thus both the kṣatriya and the brahma-kṣatriya models prevailed almost contemporaneously in the same region. The Śilāhāras, who ruled over Koṅkaṅ and south Maharashtra, described themselves as kṣatriyas (*Karnataka Inscriptions*, II, 45, inscription No. 12 of 1940-1).
159 D.R. Bhandarkar, *JASB*, NS, V (1909), 186; also see 'Foreign Elements', rpt., pp. 35f.
160 D.C. Sircar, *The Guhilas of Kiṣkindhā* (hereafter *Guhilas*) (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 3-11.
161 S. Sankaranarayanan, *The Vishṇukuṇḍis and Their Times* (Delhi, 1977), pp. 24-6.
162 Veena Das, *Structure and Cognition: Aspects of Hindu Caste and Ritual*, p. 13.
163 It is curious that S. Sankaranarayanan quotes the Śānti Parva account speaking of the Āndhras as born of brahma-kṣatra family (op. cit.,

p. 30, fn. 111), but ignores the references to Āndhras as *mlecchas* and *abrahmaṇyas* in those very Puranic chapters which give the genealogy of Pūru, for example, *Matsya Purāṇa*, 50, 75-6; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX, 20, 30.

164 In the Chezarla inscription (*SII*, VI, No. 594) the Ānanda kings are said to have sprung 'from the lineage of the great sage Ānanda'. Later kings of this dynasty assumed the title 'Varman' indicative of their kṣatriya status. The Pallava kings claimed descent from Brahmā and the brāhmaṇa hero Aśvatthāmā and belonged to the Bhāradvāja *gotra*. Not only do most of the Pallava kings have the kṣatriya title 'Varman', Narasiṃhavarman II and Nandivarman, are also described as *kṣatracuḍāmaṇi* and *kṣatriyamalla* in the Kaśakudi plates (*SII*, II, Pt 3, No. 73; *EI*, XIX, 106). The Pallava king Dantivarman claimed the brahma-kṣatra status (*SII*, XII, No. 48; 88 of 1910 and 529 of 1905). K.K. Pillay argues (in his article, 'Were the Pallavaas Brahmins?', *Journal of Oriental Research*, University of Madras, Silver Jubilee Volume, 1975, pp. 242-5) that the Pallavas were originally kṣatriyas and were later elevated to brāhmaṇa status. But this clearly goes against the evidence of inscriptions which suggest a transition from brāhmaṇa to kṣatriya status, and is also against the brahmanical norms. The only example of a kṣatriya becoming a brāhmaṇa is that of Viśvāmitra, but he had to give up his kingdom and adopt the priestly functions. This cannot be said of the Pallavas. The successors of the Kadamba king Mayūraśarman assumed the title of 'Varmā' indicative of their kṣatriya status. For the claims of Kadambas to brahma-kṣatra status, see J.F. Fleet, 'Sanskrit and Old Canarese Inscriptions', *IA*, IV, 208f.

165 Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi, 1967), p. 27.

166 *Amarakośa*, ed., Vamanacharya Jhalakikar (Mumbai, 1907), II. 7.2.

167 D.C. Sircar, *Guhilas*, pp. 7-8.

168 Surajit Sinha, op. cit., pp. 60-1.

169 The Cheros of Shahabad, who claim to be Rajputs on account of descent from Cyavana *ṛṣi* and the daughter of a Rajput king of Bundelkhand, provide another such example from recent history, K. Suresh Singh, 'A Study in State-Formation Among Tribal Communities', *Historical Probings*, p. 332.

170 J.F. Fleet, *IA*, XV (1886), pp. 223-4.

171 Surajit Sinha, op. cit., p. 42.

172 Yadava, *SCNI*, p. 30.

173 Ibid. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p. 69.
174 D.C. Sircar, *Guhilas*, p. 10. V.S. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India* (Calcutta, 1966), p. 146.
175 A.S. Altekar, *The Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Their Times*, pp. 117f; Yadava, *SCNI*, p. 12.
176 C.V. Vaidya, *History of Medieval Hindu India*, III (Pune, 1962), p. 374.
177 Yadava, *SCNI*, pp. 35-6.
178 Surajit Sinha, op. cit., pp. 49f.
179 Quoted by Yadava, *SCNI*, p. 37.
180 Frances Taft Plunket, 'Royal Marriages in Rajasthan', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, No. 7 (1973), pp. 64-80.
181 For information regarding some kṣatriya merchants in the Āndhra country in the early centuries of the Christian era, see K. Gopalachari, *Early History of the Āndhra Country* (Chennai, 1941), p. 91. B.D. Chattopadhyaya cites two tenth-century inscriptions from Rajasthan and U.P. Referring to a kṣatriya *sūtradhāra* and a kṣatriya *vaṇik* (op. cit., p. 77).
182 For bibliography, see ibid.; Dasharath Sharma, op. cit.
183 J.N. Asopa, op. cit.
184 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.; B.N.S. Yadava, *SCNI*, pp. 32f.
185 Suvira Jaiswal Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, *PIHC* (1977), p. 44.
186 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.; idem, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994), p. 71.
187 *EI*, XXXV, pp. 159f; D.C. Sircar, *Guhilas*, p. 21.
188 For Māyideva, ibid., pp. 7-8. For Becirāja, infra, n. 204.
189 D.R. Bhandarkar (*Foreign Elements*, rpt., p. 65) points out that the Jain minister of Cāmuṇḍarāya of the Ganga king Rācamalla was from a brahma-kṣatra family. So were the Ganga chief Udāyaditya and Śrīgirinātha Odeyar, the governor of Āraṅga under Devarāya II of Vijayanagara. All these were from the Karnataka region. Interestingly, the Sena kings of Bengal, who are described as brahma-kṣatriyas, also came from Karnataka. To these examples we may add that of *mahāsāmantādhipati* Śāntivarman, ruler of Banavasi 1200, said to be born in the brahma-kṣatriya Māṭūra family (*EI*, XI, No. 1, 1, 1.5). The inscription is datable in the tenth century. We have already referred to Māyideva, a feudatory of the Kadambas. The Kasakudi plates of Nandivarman Pallava speak of a Pallava official, Brahmaśrīrāja, as 'one who possessed the full and unshakeable splendour of the brhāmaṇa and kṣatriya castes' (Hultzsch, *SII*, II, Pt 3, pp. 350-1).

190 Burton Stein, 'Brahman and Peasant in Early South Indian History', *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, XXXI-XXXII (Chennai, 1967-8), pp. 229-69.
191 Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1980).
192 Ibid., p. 188.
193 N. Subrahmanian, *Sangam Polity* (Chennai, 1966), pp. 57, 59; V. Kanakasabhai, *Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago* (Chennai, 1974), p. 106.
194 Ibid., p. 104.
195 Richard S. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 2.
196 Sister M. Liceria, A.C., 'Emergence of Brāhmaṇas as Landed Intermediaries in Karnataka: A.D. 1000-1300', *IHR*, Vol. I, No. 1 (March 1974), p. 29.
197 Richard S. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 3.
198 This type of village structure continued to exist until recent times. See Kathleen Gough, 'The Social Structure of A Tanjore Village' in M.N. Srinivas, ed., *India's Villages* (Mumbai, 2nd revd. edn., 1960), pp. 90f.
199 M. Arokiaswami, 'The Origin of the Veḷḷāḷas', *Journal of Indian History*, XXXIII (1955), pp. 25-9; XXXIV (1956), pp. 191f; V. Kanakasabhai, op. cit., pp. 113f.
200 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in the Social Structure of the Early Tamils', *Historical Probings*, pp. 130, 140.
201 R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes*, p. 12.
202 Burton Stein, *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, XXXI-XXXII (Chennai, 1967-8), pp. 237-8; idem, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*, p. 71.
203 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras*, pp. 31f.
204 The Kammas, a Telugu-speaking caste, claim to be kṣatriyas, but they are primarily agriculturists and appear to have been so long before being infected by the varṇa ideology. This is evident from their marriage ritual which requires the bridegroom to perform a mimic ploughing ceremony (Thurston, op. cit., III, p. 103). An inscription of Śaka Era 1095 speaks of Becirāja (Becarasa or Becaiya), a 'high minister' of Rācamalla I, of the family of the Sinda Mahāmaṇḍaleśvaras, as one who was born in *candra-vaṃśa* in Hārītakula and was 'a creeping plant of goodly fame' to the Kamma (caste). See, *EI*, XIV, No. 19B, 1, 31. Apparently Becirāja claimed descent from the lunar line of the kṣatriyas.
205 P.C. Chaudhury, op. cit., p. 340.
206 Suvira Jaiswal, *PIHC* (1977), pp. 40-1.

207 Referring to the view of R.S. Sharma that in spite of Manu's diatribes against the śūdras, their status had improved in post-Mauryan times and that they had acquired new rights in the Gupta period, Dumont remarks, 'If this phenomenon were corroborated, it would have to be more strictly linked to the competition between Hinduism and the more or less heretical sects' to whom the śūdras were indebted for their 'promotion' (*Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 284f, n. 32g). Once again Dumont tries to explain modifications in the status of śūdras in terms of sectarian rivalry, without going into the roots of the problem. Dumont does not explain why neo-brahmanism or Hinduism considered it important to compete with the heretical sects to win influence among the śūdras when Vedic brahmanism had not hesitated to ignore them and condemn them to life 'without gods', unfit for sacrifice and salvation. Vivekanand Jha has shown that the Buddhist attitude towards the lower castes was hardly different from the brahmanical attitude ('Stages in the History of Untouchables', *IHR,* Vol. II, No. 1, July 1975, pp. 21-2). The point is further developed in his unpublished thesis, 'Early History of Untouchables in India' (Patna University, 1972). The same can be said about Jainism.

208 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras,* 2nd edn., pp. 305f.

209 *Devī Bhāgavata,* V. 20, 46; IX, 8.62, quoted in B.N.S. Yadava, *SCNI,* p. 13.

210 *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa,* p. 189, vv, 7-8, quoted in B.N.S. Yadava, op. cit.

211 J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India,* p. 172.

212 B.N.S. Yadava, *IHR,* Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), p. 47.

213 B.N.S. Yadava, *SCNI,* p. 38.

214 K.C. Jain, *Malawa Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1972), p. 485.

215 Dasharatha Sharma, *Rajasthan Through the Ages,* Vol. I (Bikaner, 1966), p. 438. He is however wrong in saying that the contention that the vaiśyas were levelled to the position of śūdras in early medieval times is based on the evidence of Alberuni only. The clubbing of vaiśyas and śūdras is found in early Buddhist Pāli sources.

216 Two vaiśya brothers, Tejaḥkāla and Vastukāla of the Prāgvāṭa family were ministers under Bhīma II of Gujarat who ruled from 1178 to 1239. B.N.S. Yadava, *SCNI,* p. 25.

217 R. Narasimha Rao, *Corporate Life in Medieval Āndhradeśa* (Secunderabad, 1967), p. 34.

218 In his *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India,* Burton

Stein also notices the three strata (pp. 85, 103). According to him, the middle strata included most of the peasantry, and ranking within it was so competitive that 'The dual division into right and left hand castes became an important structural ancillary.' However, he writes that 'the Veḷḷāḷas, Reḍḍys and Kammas sought to remain above the dual division, along with Brāhmans' (p. 85). This would be in keeping with the high position of these communities in the south Indian social order. But later (p. 187) Stein categorically speaks of the Veḷḷāḷas as 'the dominant peasants of the right division, the vaḷaṅgai'. According to J.H. Hutton, too, the Veḷḷāḷas belonged to the right hand division (op. cit., p. 60). In spite of this confusion Stein's work is an important contribution.

219 *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, II.4.10.

220 Śaṅkarācārya's commentary on *Brahma Sūtra*, I.4.12.

221 *Sāmba Purāṇa*, 66.10.

222 A peculiar feature of south Indian society is the division of non-brāhmaṇa castes into 'Right Hand' and 'Left Hand', two vertically divided sodalities. Although tradition attributes the creation of this dual division to the legendary king Karikāla Coḷa, it does not seem to have been a feature of Tamil society in the Śaṅgam period but is well-attested in inscriptions from the eleventh century onwards (K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Coḷas*, University of Madras, Chennai, 1975, pp. 550-2). The divide was marked by acute hostility resulting in bloody conflicts, particularly in the time of East India Company (Kanakalatha Mukund, 'Caste Conflict in South India in Early Colonial Port Cities: 1650-1800', *Studies in History*, Vol. XI, No. 2, July-December 1995, pp. 1-27). Hutton traced its origin to conflict between the matrilineal (*marumakkathayam*) and patrilineal (*makkathayam*) systems. He suggested that those who changed over to the Aryan patrilineal system came to be known as 'Left Hand' and those who stayed with the original matrilineal practices came to be known as 'Right Hand'. The division has virtually disappeared now but was very sharp and antagonistic in earlier times. Some see in it the rebellion of the artisan classes who belonged to the Left Hand against the domination of the Right Hand Veḷḷāḷa landlords (Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture*, Syracuse, 1982, pp. 83-4). But Karashima attributes it to the contending claims in an agrarian economy (Noboru Karashima, 'The Uprising of the *valaṅgai/iḍaṅgai* Groups: Conflict in an Agrarian Society' in *Towards a New Formation* (Delhi, 1992, pp. 141-8). His thesis is plausible, but

the question of origin remains obscure and conjectural owing to the lack of concrete data. The formation of a sodality slurring over stratified relations within it could be a ruling class elite manoeuvre creating the 'other' and thus bifurcating common concerns and interests of the labouring classes, already fragmented into castes. This would be particularly necessary in a society marked by sharp cleavages. From this point of view the traditional view ascribing the creation of the dual division to a Coḷa monarch is pertinent. At the same time, the collective identity, as Mukund writes, could also provide 'access to decision-making power centres in caste society as well as a channel for articulation of the grievances' to the deprived castes. Her data shows that conflict between two depressed castes such as Right Hand Paraiyar and the Left Hand Paḷḷi (Vaṉṉiyar) both agricultural castes of Tamilnadu and, similarly between the Māla and the Māḍigā of Andhra Pradesh, have been the most violent features of the Right-Left division. For more bibliographical references see Mukund, op. cit.

223 See, for instance, the inscriptions of the Reḍḍy kings (*EI*, VIII, No. 3.11.2-3). The panegyrist of Singaya Nayaka's Akkalapuṇḍi grant even goes to the extent of saying that the śūdra varṇa is purer than the other three as it was born from the feet of Viṣṇu along with the river Bhāgīrathī. For this and several other examples of the śūdra rulers' patronage of the brāhmaṇas and the *varṇāsramadharma*, see H.S. Kotiyal, 'Śūdra Rulers and Officials in Early Medieval Times', *PIHC*, 34th Session (Chandigarh, 1973), pp. 80-7.

224 Masulipatam plates of Ammāraja II, lines 39-51, *EI*, XXIV, No. 38.

225 Jack Goody, ed., *Character of Kinship*, pp. 191-229.

226 *Skanda Purāṇa*, VII.166.124; A.B.L. Avasthi, *Studies in Skanda Purāṇa*, Pt 1, p. 291.

227 According to Ajay Mitra Shastri, the terms Ugra, Niṣāda, Śvapāca, etc., refer to the offspring of intercaste unions and indicate the prevalence of inter-caste marriages (op. cit, p. 202, fn. 9). Also see J.D.M. Derret, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, p. 175; K.C. Jain, op. cit., pp. 134-9. For similar views on the origin of the Cāṇḍāla caste, see Sandhya Mukerjee, op. cit., pp. 27-9; Brij Narain Sharma, op. cit., pp. 61, 68.

228 P.V. Kane, op. cit., II, Pt 1, 51; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Coḷas* (Chennai, 1975), p. 549; R.C. Majumdar and R.C. Hazra in *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 566. For a detailed discussion of the problem, see Vivekanand Jha, 'Varṇasaṃkara in the Dharmaśutras: Theory and Practice', *JESHO*, XIII, No. 3, pp. 273-88.

229 Thus it is not bias which makes Manu describe the Andhras and the Medas as 'low castes' following the profession of hunting (*Manusmṛti*, X, 48-9). It appears that in eastern India tribal groups of the Āndhras and the Medas continued to live in forest areas by hunting and food-gathering down to the time of the Pālas. The Pāla landgrants are addressed to them as well. But, as we have already seen, in Āndhra Pradesh the Viṣṇukuṇḍins of the Andhra origin claimed a brahma-kṣatriya status.

230 F.A. Marglin, op. cit., p. 255.

231 N.K. Dutt, op. cit., II, pp. 89-90.

232 R.C. Majumdar, ed., *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, pp. 569f.

233 N.K. Dutt, op. cit., II, 88.

234 Ibid.

235 Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, I, pp. 640-1.

236 Edited by Gopinath Kaviraj, with introduction by Narayana Sastri Khiste, 2 vols (Varanasi, 1933 and 1936). Śeṣa Kṛṣṇa wrote this work in the time of Pīlāji Rao, a king of *dakṣiṇātya*. According to Khiste, Śeṣa Kṛṣṇa also wrote *Kaṃsavadham* at the behest of Todarmal's son Giridhārī.

237 Ibid., I, pp. 68-9.

238 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

239 *bali, caru, vaiśvadeva, agnihotra* and *atithi* mentioned in *EI*, XIX, *CII*, III, 4, quoted in D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, s.v. *pañca-mahāyajña*. In the *Manusmṛti*, III, 69-71, these are mentioned as *brahmayajña, pitṛyajña devayajña, bhūtayajña* and *nṛyajña* and explained as the teaching and study of the Vedas, the sacrifice to the manes, the sacrifice to the gods, the *bali* offering to the *bhūtas* (creatures), and the hospitable reception of guests. Later, as applied to śūdras, these came to mean the worship of the brāhmaṇas, of the manes, of the gods, offerings to creatures and honouring the guests.

240 For similar views expressed by Kamalākara Bhaṭṭa, the author of the *Nirṇayasindhu*, and Raghunandana in the *Śūdrakṛtyatattva*, see Kane, op. cit., II, Pt I, 198. P.V. Kane enumerates as many as thirty brahmanical law-books composed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries dealing with the rules of conduct for the śūdras. He quotes Viśveśvara Bhaṭṭa who writes in his *Smṛti Kaumudī* that the earlier law-givers have generally dealt with the *dharma* of the upper three varṇas and have not paid any attention to the *dharma* of the śūdras, hence he wishes to 'clearly expound the *dharmas* of the last varṇa' (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. I, pp. 383-4). Bhaṭṭa gives a detailed account of the rights of 'simple'

śūdras and śūdras born of 'mixed marriages'. The work was written in the latter half of the fourteenth century at the behest of king Madanapāla who ruled over a petty kingdom near Delhi.

Irfan Habib has shown that the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate was a stimulus to urbanization and certain social and economic changes owing to the infusion of new technology and increased demand for artisanal services. The artisan castes in particular faced socio-economic disparities and resultant social tensions were articulated by the *bhakti* saints, such as Kabir, Dadu and Nanak (Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate: An Essay in Interpretation', *IHR*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 287-303; idem, 'Medieval Popular Monotheism and its Humanism: The Historical Setting', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 21, Nos. 3-4 (March-April 1993), pp. 78-88. The material environment provided the incentive to brahmanical intellectuals and drew their attention to the religious needs of the śūdra castes; it prompted them to make adjustments within the traditional framework and adopt more flexible and liberal attitudes.

241 *Science and Society in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1977), pp. 213-16, 220-2.

242 R.S. Sharma, *Social Changes*, pp. 9-10.

243 It is curious that Romila Thapar regards the rise of the Kāyastha caste as 'a good example of the upward mobility of an occupational group' (*Historical Probings*, p. 112; reprinted in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 138). The caste mainly drew upon the literate members of the upper three twice-born castes but the Purāṇas gave it a śūdra status. Hence, so far as the ritual ranking is concerned, it is a case of downward mobility. According to N.K. Dutt, Kāyasthas were recruited mostly from the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya varṇas (op. cit., II, Calcutta, 2nd edn., 1969, pp. 53-6).

244 The exact Sanskrit parallel of the English word 'untouchable' (*aspṛśya*) is found in the *Viṣṇusmṛti*, V. 104, where the law-giver goes to the extent of prescribing death to an untouchable if he deliberately touches one who is not.

245 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras*, p. 4.

246 *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1 (July 1975), pp. 21-2, 31.

247 Ibid., p.17.

248 N.K. Dutt, op. cit.

249 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras*, p. 131.

250 Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in his foreword to Stephen Fuch's *The Children of Hari* (Vienna, 1949), pp. vi-viii.

251 George L. Hart III, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil* (Berkeley, 1975).
252 Ibid., pp. 119f.
253 K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (London, 1968).
254 Hart, op. cit., p. 129.
255 Ibid., p. 149.
256 *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, 363, quoted, ibid., p. 124.
257 Ibid., pp. 93f, 126.
258 Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 47; Kane, op. cit., II, Pt 1, pp. 168f.
259 Eleanor B. Leacock's Review of Steven Goldberg's *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, in *American Anthropologist*, LXXVI, No. 2 (1974), p. 365.
260 Ibid.
261 Thurston informs us that a Paraiyan will never allow a brāhmaṇa to enter his habitat. If a brāhmaṇa does venture in, water mixed with cowdung is thrown at his head and he is driven out. The Paraiyans claim that they were the first to be created and to wear the sacred thread and that they are cousins of the brāhmaṇas (op. cit., VI, 84f).
262 Hart, op. cit., p. 13.
263 A Paraiyan has to perform the ritual of tying a *tāli* round the neck of the Black Mother-goddess in Chennai. The Paraiyans are allowed to pull the cars of the idols during the great festivals held at Kumbhakonam, Srivilliputtur and Kanchipuram. In Tanjore, during the great festival of Śiva at Trivalur, the headman of the Paraiyans is mounted on the elephant with the god and carries his *cauri* (Thurston, op. cit., VI, 84).
264 Ibid.
265 Also see supra, pp. 7f. A typical example of confusing effect with cause is provided by Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya who believes that the custom of untouchability was introduced into the Aryan world by the aboriginal tribes. He writes that among the aborigines 'a man following low profession, such as the one working in cremation ground, etc., or a woman in her periods, or persons carrying dead bodies are regarded as untouchables, in the last two cases at least temporarily'(op. cit., pp. 151f). When the occupational groups became hereditary, those who pursued these 'low' professions became untouchables 'under the influence of the aboriginal customs'. But he does not explain why certain social groups followed these polluting occupations on a hereditary basis even when it made them 'impure' and lowered their social status. In an obvious effort to present the practice of untouchability in ancient

India in less objectionable colours, Chattopadhyaya refers to a verse in the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*, which describes atheists, misers, ungrateful persons and people who cherish their anger for long as Cāṇḍālas by conduct, the Cāṇḍāla by birth being the fifth type. He comes to the conclusion that in ancient India untouchability was associated not only with birth and profession but also with the 'mental states of persons'. In his view the above-quoted verse clearly illustrates that of the five classes of untouchables (Cāṇḍālas) four were determined by conduct alone (ibid., pp. 160, 161). Such attempts at interpreting the brahmanical denunciations of the non-conformists and socially undesirable persons too literally and taking these as proof of the existence of certain categories of untouchables formed on the basis of bad conduct alone are too naive to deserve serious consideration. Chattopadhyaya's explanation would have hardly merited mention if there were no inherent danger of its being utilized by the obscurantist elements to idealize the ancient epoch.

266 *Baudhayāna Śrauta Śūtra* (edited by W. Caland), XV. 6.

267 S.K. Das, *The Economic History of Ancient India*, pp. 139f quoted by R.S. Sharma, *Śudras*, p. 53.

268 Hutton, op. cit., p. 62.

269 Vivekanand Jha, 'Stages in the History of Untouchables' *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1 (July 1975), p. 24.

270 Food prepared with water without the use of clarified butter.

271 Food cooked with clarified butter, as, for example, *pūris* or sweetmeats.

272 Hutton, op. cit., pp. 163-4.

273 Suvira Jaiswal, Presidential Address, Section I, *PIHC*, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977), pp. 30f.

274 *Āpastamba Śrauta-sūtra*, XVII, 26.18; *Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra*, VIII, 2.8; Vivekanand Jha, 'From Tribe to Untouchable: The Case of Niṣādas', *Historical Probings*, p. 69.

275 *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 1 (July 1975), p. 12.

276 Kane, op. cit., II, Pt 1, 791.

277 *Amarakośa*, II, 9.27.

278 Ibid., II, 9.28. *āndhasaḥ* means 'the scum of boiled rice'. Hence *āndhasika* is one who cooks rice.

279 *Laghu-Āśvalāyanasmṛti*, I.176 (in *Smṛtināṃ Samuccayaḥ*, Ānandāśrama-sanskṛta Granthāvali No. 48, 1919). *Guruḥ sutaḥ* is evidently a corruption for *guroḥ sutaḥ*. Kane apparently used some other edition which mentioned 'elderly relative' in place of 'teacher's son' (op. cit., II, Pt II, 791).

280 Op. cit., V. 173.

281 See Pushpa Prasad, 'Female Slavery in Thirteenth Century Gujarat: Documents in the *Lekhapaddhati*', *IHR*, Vol. XV, Nos. 1-2 (1988-9), pp. 270-5.

282 Ibid., p. 273.

283 *EI*, XVI, No. 1, II, pp. 67-8.

284 Sometimes it is argued that the śūdra was better off than the brāhmaṇa as prescriptions for purificatory rites were less rigorous for him than for the brāhmaṇa, and what others regarded as his disabilities, the śūdra might have regarded as 'boons'. See Brij Narain Sharma, *Social Life in Northern India* (Delhi, 1966), p. 55. This is, to say the least, a superficial view. In a society which placed a premium on the observance of purificatory rites, social recognition of the comparative laxity of a community in these matters meant low status, and as M.N. Srinivas has shown, lower communities tried to improve their social status through a process of Sanskritization, i.e. by adopting the behaviour pattern of higher communities and emulating them in matters of food, drink and marriage. According to Brij Narain Sharma the smṛti rule that a śūdra who has taken water polluted by the touch of a Cāṇḍāla becomes pure by observing a fast for that day, but a brāhmaṇa has to fast for three days, is an example of the 'concessions' given to the śūdras. He does not realize that this so-called concession originated from the concept of relative impurity of the śūdra and his comparative proximity to the Cāṇḍāla in the social scale. Once the ideology of purity/pollution developed in the social framework of the varṇas it was further elaborated in a logically consistent manner by the brahmanical thinkers. See Henry Orenstein 'Logical Congruence in Hindu Sacred Law: Another Interpretation', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, N.S., No. 4 (1970), pp. 22f. But we must not forget that even though the ideologies evolve through individual inventions, these arise out of the prevailing material conditions and as such reflect the ideas of the dominant class. Further, it is the role of ideology to secure the acceptance of the exploited.

285 A.S. Altekar (*The Rāṣtrakūṭas and Their Times*, Pune, 1934, p. 338) and P.V. Kane (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, Pt I, pp. 789-90) have shown that the early law-givers such as Gautama, Āpastamba and Baudhāyana impose no restrictions on a brāhmaṇa taking food cooked in the houses of the members of the other three varṇas but a gradual increase is noticed in later texts such as those of Aṅgiras, Yama and Vyāsa. B.N.S. Yadava points out (*SCNI*,

p. 7) that according to the *Tantravārtika* of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa dining in the company of one's relations and friends of a different varṇa did not cause contamination down to the eighth century. The brahmanical law-books not only provide differential rules of inheritance for sons born of wives of different varṇas, but even prescribe different periods of ceremonial purity and impurity to be observed on the death of a relative belonging to a different varṇa (A.S. Altekar, *Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Delhi, 3rd edn., 1962, pp. 75-6). All this cannot be dismissed as brahmanical propensity to theorization with no basis in reality, for literary texts and inscriptions of early medieval times do contain references to inter-varṇa marriages of specific individuals. Thus Bāṇa Bhaṭṭa mentions a Pāraśava brother, born of the śūdra wife of his father. A copper-plate grant of Rājarāja Devendravarman (11th century) speaks of the donee as the son of a brāhmaṇa from a vaiśya girl. Refer C.V. Ramachandra Rao, *Administration and Society in Medieval Āndhra (A.D. 1038-1538) Under the Later Eastern Gaṅgas and the Sūryavaṃśa Gajapatis* (Nellore, 1976), p. 318.

286 Vivekanand Jha, 'Early History of Untouchables in India', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Patna University, 1972.

287 *IHR*, Vol. II, No. 2 (January 1976), pp. 514-15.

288 Fürer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. viii-ix.

289 Hutton, op. cit., p. 171.

290 R.D. Sanwal has shown that whereas the politico-economic factors were crucial determinants, 'ritually edifying' practices such as vegetarianism, teetotalism, religious austerity and connubial exclusiveness had low status connections in Kumaon. I feel that the operation of ritual factors has been greatly exaggerated in studies on caste. Even wine does not seem to have been a taboo for upper caste women as late as the time of Kumārila: he disapproves of the practice, but admits that brāhmaṇa women of Ahicchatra and Mathura often drank wine (see his *Tantravārtika*, Adhyaya I, Pada iii, Adhikaraṇa 4 (a); see also the English Translation, p. 194). However, Kumārila prohibits only brāhmaṇas from drinking any kind of wine; he allows kṣatriyas and vaiśyas to drink *madhu* (wine distilled from grapes or any other fruit) and *sidhu* (wine distilled from molasses) but condemns *surā* (wine distilled from grain) apparently taken by poorer people (ibid., p. 193). The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XII. 8.1.6), however, allows the *rājanya* to take *surā*. For the gradual recognition of vegetarianism as a symbol of 'pure'

conduct and its acceptance as a religious principle, see Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, (Delhi, 2nd revd. edn., 1981), pp. 127-9.

291 Surajit Sinha, op. cit., p. 35-80.

292 K. Suresh Singh, 'A Study in State Formation Among Tribal Communities', *Historical Probings*, p. 38, fn. 2.

293 Fleet, *Indian Antiquary*, XI, 9f; Grierson, ibid., XV (1886), 15.

294 First published in 1933; revised and enlarged in 1956.

295 First published in 1938.

296 R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (Delhi, 1983), p. 10.

297 Clarise Bader, *Women in Ancient India* (London, 1925).

298 For works published till 1975, see *A Select Bibliography on Women of India* (S.N.D.T. Women's University, Mumbai). Also see Suvira Jaiswal, 'Women in Early India: Problems and Perspectives', *PIHC*, (Bodh Gaya, 1981), pp. 54-60; Uma Chakravarti, 'Note Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards A New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian History', *Social Scientist*, Vol. XVI, No. 8 (August 1988), pp. 46-52.

299 For example, see Shakambhari Jayal, *The Status of Women in the Epics* (Delhi, 1966), pp. 25, 70. Compare pages 291f with Altekar's *Position of Women*, pp. 337f; Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., pp. 109f.

300 For a debate on this, see Morgan and Engels, *Soviet Studies in History*, Vol. IV (New York, 1966). Eleanor B. Leacock, Introduction to F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*; idem, Introduction to Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (Gloucester, 1974); Kathleen Gough, 'An Anthropologist Looks at Engels' in Nona Glazer-Malbin and Helen Youngelson Waehrer, eds., *Women in a Man-Made World* (Chicago, 1972); idem, 'The Origin of the Family' in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward An Anthropology of Women* (London, 1975), pp. 51-76; Karen Sacks, 'Engels Revisited; Women, the Organization of Production and Private Property', ibid., pp. 211-34.

301 Kathleen Gough in 'The Origin of the Family'. Cf. Y.I. Samynov, 'Group-Marriage, Its Nature and Role in the Evolution of Marriage and Family Relations' in *VII International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences*, Vol. IV (Moscow, 1967). For 'A Marxist Reappraisal of the Matriarchate', Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Current Anthropology*, XX, No. 2 (June 1979), pp. 341f.

302 Op. cit., p. 337.

303 B.S. Upadhyaya, *Women in Ṛgveda* (Delhi, 3rd revd. edn., 1974), pp. 220f; Shakuntala Rao Shastri, *Women in the Vedic Age*, (Mumbai, 1969); P.L. Bhârgava, *India in the Vedic Age*, p. 245; P.C. Dharma, 'The Status of Women in the Vedic Age', *Journal of Indian History*, XXVI (1948), pp. 249f.

304 Sally Slocum, 'Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology', in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (London, 1975), pp. 36-50.

305 Kathleen Gough, 'The Origin of the Family', in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, p. 70.

306 R.S. Sharma, 'Vidatha: the Earliest Folk-Assembly of the Indo-Aryans', *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1968), pp. 78-95; Charles Drekmeir, *Kingship and Community in Early India* (London, 1968), p. 53. J.W. Spellman (*Political Theory of Ancient India,* London, 1964, p. 96) and J.P. Sharma (*Republics in Ancient India*, Leiden, 1968, pp. 78-9) have tried to refute his view on the ground that the term *vidathya*, meaning 'fit for the *vidatha'*, shows that the *vidatha* was a more select body. But since the term occurs in the first *maṇḍala* which is later than the Family Books, it does not controvert R.S. Sharma's thesis (op. cit., p. 92) which concedes that the *vidatha* may have become a more select body in later times. Spellman and J.P. Sharma regard the *vidatha* as a non-tribal, local and religious body which did not have political or distributive functions. This is not the place to examine their arguments in detail, but there is nothing to show that there were *well established territorial* groups for any purpose transcending tribal boundaries in the Vedic period. The functional polyvalence of the *vidatha* may be anathema to J.P. Sharma who discovers the existence of several types of states, republics and monarchies in the Ṛgvedic age, but in my opinion the early Vedic period should be characterized as a 'stateless' or 'pre-state' society which had not developed a clear-cut distinction between the ritual and the political.

307 'Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usages in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, XX (1938-9), p. 219.

308 *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (Mumbai, 2nd edn., 1962).

309 *Hindu Exogamy* (Mumbai, 1929).

310 'Kinship Terms and the Family Organization as Found in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*', *Bulletin of the Deccan College*

Research Institute, V (1943-4), pp. 61-148; idem, *Kinship Organization in India*, 2nd revd. edn.

311 *Hindu Kinship* (Mumbai, 1947); idem, *Marriage and Family in India* (1st edn., 1955, Delhi, 3rd edn., 1968).

312 Karve in *ABORI*, XX, 218.

313 Kapadia, *Hindu Kinship*, pp. 7-45, 222, 307-9; Ghurye, *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture*, pp. 8f, 58-9.

314 R.S. Sharma, 'Forms of Property in the Early Portions of the *Ṛgveda*', *Essays in Honour of Professor S.C. Sarkar* (Delhi, 1976), pp. 43-4.

315 Eleanor B. Leacock in Introduction to F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, p. 35.

316 *Position of Women*, pp. 342f.

317 Ibid., pp. 345f.

318 Ibid., p. 354; see also R.S. Sharma, 'Some Joint Notices of Woman and Śūdra in Early Indian Literature', *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy*, pp. 29-33.

319 J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India*, pp. 413, fn. 2, 414; U.N. Ghoshal in R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. V (Mumbai, 1966), p. 484.

320 Ghurye, *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture*, pp. 222f

321 *SCNI*, p. 140.

322 *IHR*, Vol. V, Nos. 1-2 (July 1978-January 1979), p. 74.

323 *Manusmṛti*, IX.104-5.

324 For a critique of these views, see G.S. Ghurye, *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charaṇa* (Mumbai, 1972), Chap. I.

325 Op. cit., II, Pt 1, p. 483.

326 Ibid., p. 479.

327 J. Brough, 'The Early History of Gotra', *JRAS* (1947), pp. 85f; idem, *The Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravara: A Translation of the Gotra-Pravara-Mañjarī of Paraṣottama Paṇḍita with an Introduction* (Cambridge, 1953). Also see A.C. Banerjee, *Studies in the Brāhmaṇas* (Delhi, 1963), Chap. II.

328 Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organization in India*, pp. 51-2.

329 *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charaṇa*, p. 280.

330 Ibid., p. 308.

331 Ibid., pp. 309-10.

332 'Origin of Brahmin Gotras', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society*, XXVI (1950), pp. 21-80; 'Development of the Gotra System', *P.K. Gode Commemoration Volume* (Pune, 1960), pp. 214f.

333 T.N. Madan, 'Is the Brahmanical Gotra a Grouping of Kin', *South-*

Western Journal of Anthropology, XVIII (Albuquerque, 1962), pp. 59f.

334 For example, Śakadvīpīs. The Śakadvīpīs or Śakaladivīpīs are divided into a number of *puras* and marriage within the *puras* is prohibited, J.N. Bhattacharya, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, rpt. (Calcutta, 1968), p. 38.

335 Ghurye, *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charaṇa,* p. 307.

336 'Gotrantara or the Change of a Woman's Gotra', *PIHC* (Annamalai Nagar, 1945), pp. 48-52; cf. *Society and Administration in Ancient and Medieval India,* I, pp. 209f.

337 For the difference between the two, see A.M. Shah, *The Household Dimension of Family in India* (Delhi, 1973), pp. 114-15.

338 R.N. Nandi, 'Gotra and Social Mobility in the Deccan', *PIHC* (Jabalpur, 1970), pp. 118-24.

339 Wagle, op. cit., p. 70.

340 H.H. Risley classifies five types of exogamous units—totemic, territorial, titular, eponymous and local, communal or family, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, I, i-lxxi.

341 In the *Kathākośaprakaraṇa* the *varakas* tell a vaiśya merchant that his daughter will have to be given in marriage to someone who does not belong to his *gotra* (Dasharath Sharma, op. cit., p. 452). Pāṇini lists a number of kṣatriya *gotras* (V.S. Agrawala, *India As Known to Pāṇini*, p. 77).

342 For an interesting attempt, see B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit.

343 A.M. Shah, op. cit., pp. 124f.

344 T.R. Trautmann, 'Cross-Cousin Marriage in Ancient North India' in Trautmann, ed., *Kinship and History in South Asia* (Michigan, 1974), pp. 61-103.

345 For this and other references, see R.S. Sharma, *Light on Early Indian Society and Economy,* p. 20. According to Rajbali Pandey, a supplementary hymn of the *Ṛgveda* shows that marriage with the daughter of one's maternal uncle and paternal aunt was permissible, *Hindu Saṃskāras* (Delhi, 2nd edn., 1669), p. 174.

346 The northern Madras are generally located in Kashmir and the southern Madras in central Punjab, H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta, 5th edn., 1950), p. 64.

347 Romila Thapar's review of T.R. Trautmann's *Kinship and History in South Asia*, in *IHR*, Vol. III, No. 1 (July 1976), p. 149.

348 David F. Alberle, 'Matrilineal Descent in Cross- Cultural Perspective'

in David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship* (Berkeley, 1961), p. 658f.

349 Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (London, 1975), Introduction; Eleanor B. Leacock in Introduction to Pt II of Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Gloucester, Mass., 1974).

350 U.N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Delhi, 1965), p. 2.

351 Sarva Daman Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1978).

352 Op. cit., p. 30.

353 Op. cit., p. 32.

354 For the office of *dharmādhikaraṇika* in Assam, see 'Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva', *EI*, II, pp. 347f. This official is also mentioned in the Benares copper plate of the Cedi king Karṇadeva (AD 1042). King Ballalāsena, credited with the systematization of caste hierarchy in Bengal, had an official known as *dharmādhyakṣa* who may have discharged similar functions (Naihati grant of Ballālasena, *EI*, XIV, pp. 156f, 160). The *Matsya Purāṇa* (CCXV.24) says that the *dharmādhikārī* must be a brāhmaṇa and a *kulīna*, quoted by P.V. Kane, op. cit., III, 126.

355 An interesting case of change of caste by way of punishment at the orders of a Tughlaq king is brought to light in a copper plate inscription of Hijra 822 (AD 1414). The inscription says that twelve kṣatriyas who were personal attendants of the king of Delhi committed a serious offence. For this they were ordered to be shot, but Pandit Nanda Rama Chaube of Jaunpur, the priest of the treasurer Seth Maniram of Sarkar Shahi, intervened and had the punishment commuted to a change of caste to that of the goldsmiths. The kṣatriya offenders and their descendants were forbidden to wear arms and the dress of kṣatriyas and were forced to earn their livelihood as workers in gold and silver. They had to give up their own *gotra* and assume the Kaśyapa *gotra*. For this act of kindness the fallen kṣatriyas agreed to pay certain dues to the Chaube and his descendants, R.K. Chaube, *PIHC* (Allahabad, 1938), pp. 147-8.

3

Stratification in Ṛgvedic Society: Evidence and Paradigms

EVER SINCE THE APPLICATION OF modern historical and philological methods of criticism to the study of ancient Sanskrit texts a large number of reconstructions of early Vedic society have been attempted on the basis of the *Ṛgveda.* Yet the picture of the Ṛgvedic society continues to be hazy and controversial. In recent years in a short span of five years three eminent scholars, G.S. Ghurye, R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar, have published monographs[1] dealing with the subject and each of them has used tools provided by history and social anthropology. Needless to say, they arrive at very different conclusions. The work of Bruce Lincoln,[2] published about the same time, exemplifies the continuing interest of Western anthropologists in the theme. It adds a new dimension by attempting to establish the ecological context of Ṛgvedic religion and society through the cross-cultural method. The multiplicity of paradigms and conflicting interpretations of evidence make an assessment of the theoretical and empirical bases of these historical-anthropological constructs essential.

I

Ghurye belongs to that rare breed of sociologists who interfuse their knowledge of ethnography with an extensive study of historical records. His *Vedic India* is a voluminous work which uses a wide range of literary, archaeological and ethnographic data to study almost every aspect of Vedic India beginning with the cultural complex of the early Indo-Europeans to the non-

literate peoples of the areas not covered by Vedic culture. He begins with the statement[3] that the Vedic period extends from about 2500 BC to 600 BC, but modifies this view later to conclude that the Ṛgvedic Indo-Aryans entered India around 2200 BC.[4] According to him, the bulk of Ṛgvedic hymns were composed in the latter half of the fourteenth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries BC; some were composed around 2000 BC and a few late ones around 1000 BC. He agrees with Pargiter that the compilation of the *Ṛgveda* took place about 980 BC; and on linguistic evidence supplemented by 'traditional history' culled from the Vedic and epic-Purāṇic sources he postulates the arrival of an earlier wave of pre-Ṛgvedic Indo-Europeans, who migrated to the east settling in the regions of Magadha and Kosala. The brahmanical culture of post-Vedic times, in his view, was mainly the result of interaction between these two waves of Aryans. In his discussion of the archaeological sites of the Harappa culture he leaves out those located outside India, that is, Bharat, and although he regards the early Vedic phase a late contemporary of the Harappa culture, he does not think that the latter influenced the former; for in his view the cultural environment of the two were distinct.[5]

It is strange that although Ghurye's comprehensive probings into the archaeological material clearly indicate that there is scant trace of urban settlement[6] in the areas inhabited by the Vedic tribes, he has no hesitation in asserting, solely on the basis of his interpretations of the Ṛgvedic hymns, that the culture of the Ṛgvedic society was 'essentially an urban one'.[7] But the hymns cited in this connection may be interpreted differently, conforming to the picture derived from archaeological sources. Some of his inferences are flimsy, yet given weight in argumentation. Thus Ghurye argues that references to two-horse and even four-horse chariots in the *Ṛgveda* indicate that such vehicles were fairly numerous and this presupposes the existence of 'fairly wide and good roads' and 'fairly large settlements'.[8] However, the use of the horse-drawn chariot as a mobile fighting platform and a vehicle for the warrior nobility spread with the Indo-Europeans both to the east and to the west; and whatever be the place of their origin, there is no doubt that they were not an urban but a cattle-

tending nomadic people moving with their carts and chariots in search of better pastures. Ghurye quotes[9] Macdonell and Keith, the authors of the *Vedic Index*,[10] to assert that horse-racing was a favourite pastime of the Vedic Indians. But the recent research of Kuiper,[11] Heesterman[12] and Sparreboom[13] has established that competition and rivalry formed an intrinsic part of the original *yajña* ritual, which was closely connected with the trekking and resettling activities of the Aryan nomads. Chariot-racing was not a form of popular festivity or sport, but a serious concern. It was interwoven with the Aryan ritual of sacrifice and played a fundamental role in resolving such issues as the question of group leadership, selection[14] of a suitable site for temporary residence in the course of wandering, and so on. The sacred and the mundane were integrated and inseparable at this stage.

Ghurye is not deterred by the fact that excavations at Hastināpura failed to provide evidence of urban life in the Ganga-Yamuna region in the Vedic age or that the dates of Painted Grey Ware, which is linked by some archaeologists[15] with the Vedic Aryans, cannot be pushed back beyond 1100 BC even at a most liberal estimate. Most PGW sites have yielded dates between 800 and 500 BC and as such are rightly associated with the later Vedic peoples.[16] In any case, the PGW sites were small settlements far from the 'fairly large settlements' of Ghurye's conception. As for the copper hoard cultures of UP, Ghurye disputes the notion of their users being 'uncivilized' and 'nomadic', even as he concedes that they were not urban.[17] From Ghurye's point of view excavations at Noh in Bharatpur district and Ahar in Rajasthan are more important, for in his opinion Bharatpur was occupied by the Matsyas in Ṛgvedic times; but these, again, do not support his urban hypothesis. The Banas culture of Ahar, dated around the eighteenth century BC at its earliest levels, is distinctly a copper age culture with no trace of iron. Iron objects at Noh are datable to 725 BC.[18] Despite these lacunae Ghurye asserts that the Ṛgvedic Aryans were not only familiar with iron, but even possessed (or at least desired to possess) iron forts.[19]

References to iron in the *Ṛgveda* are perceived by interpreting the term *ayas* as iron. Initially Ghurye shows some hesitation,

as he translates *ayasmaya* as made of 'either bronze or iron'.[20] But as he visualizes a highly sophisticated sedentary urban culture of the Ṛgvedic period with towns adorned with beautiful statues of women in the nude, he becomes more and more convinced that the *ayas* should mean only iron.[21] However, an examination of the crucial passages in the *Ṛgveda* leads S.A. Dange, a Sanskritist, to conclude that *ayas* in the *Ṛgveda* 'does not seem to indicate iron . . . [it] clearly indicates the reddish brown metal (copper or bronze)'.[22]

There persists a major problem in the reconstruction of Ṛgvedic society. Although it is generally accepted that the period of the composition of Ṛgvedic hymns spans more than five hundred years extending from roughly 1500 to 1000 BC—Ghurye extends it to a thousand years—few attempts have been made to sift the internal evidence on social developments on the basis of the relative chronology of the hymns. To some extent this may have been due to the fact that, as Bloomfield pointed out,[23] the Ṛgvedic hymns are largely epigonal in character 'manufactured out of fragments of a floating anonymous literature'. This is indicated by the frequent occurrence of the phrase *navyam sanyase*, 'renovating the old song for an ancient god'. Bloomfield warns that even the family books should not be taken as chronological units, for older and newer hymns are contained in each one of them. Even so, it would not be appropriate to abandon all attempts at a relative chronology of the hymns, and making generalizations on that basis. An exercise of this kind would necessarily be based on certain theoretical premises which, however, have to be in conformity with the available empirical evidence. For example, Bruce Lincoln[24] shows that the myth of the killing of the primordial being in the first sacrifice and the fashioning of the cosmos from his dismembered body goes back to Indo-European times and may be traced in its Norse, Roman and Indo-Aryan versions, the last being the famous *puruṣasūkta* hymn in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda*. Although the myth is undoubtedly old, it does not mean that all the ideas expressed in it have an Indo-European past. This is the only hymn in the entire *Ṛgveda* which speaks of the well-known fourfold varṇa divisions of society and mentions the terms *rājanya* and 'śūdra'.

Clearly the composer of this hymn remodelled an old myth to explain and provide religious sanction for a new social situation.

It is generally accepted that the tenth *maṇḍala* and the first fifty hymns of the first *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda* are late compositions separated from the family books (the second to seventh *maṇḍalas)*, by about five hundred years or so.[25] The family books on the whole comprise the earliest layer. There was also an intermediate stage when the Saṃhitā collection ended with the eighth *maṇḍala* and a supplement was attached to it after a time in the form of Vālakhilya hymns. Hymns 51-191 of the first *maṇḍala* are considered to be of the same date as the eighth *maṇḍala* and the ninth *maṇḍala* is presumed to be closer in date to the tenth *maṇḍala*.[26] References to agricultural activities are found mostly in Books I and X and some of these reflect a pre-plough stage as these refer to the turning of the soil with a *vṛka* (a digging stick or hoe, often translated mistakenly as plough).[27] A hymn of Book IV dedicated to Kṣetrapati (Lord of the Fields), Śunā-sīra (personifications of 'plough' and 'share' according to Monier-Williams) and Sītā (furrow) is regarded as a late interpolation by Hopkins.[28] At any rate, the use of non-Aryan loan words[29] in connection with plough agriculture occurring in the later sections of the *Ṛgveda* suggests that the Ṛgvedic Aryans learnt plough cultivation from the indigenous peoples, though such borrowings are not sufficient to build a theory of 'the convergence of the Aryan and the non-Aryan' in the *Ṛgveda*, as has been ably demonstrated by Madhav M. Deshpande.[30] There is evidence of some contact, conflict and confrontation with the non-Aryans, but the *Ṛgveda* remains preeminently an Aryan document. This is also confirmed by F.B.J. Kuiper,[31] who has shown that the boar myth in the eighth *maṇḍala* is an Aryanized version of an Austro-Asiatic myth. Kuiper states that although there is some evidence of the assimilation of non-Aryans into brahmanical circles and adaptation of some foreign myths in the later *maṇḍalas* of the *Ṛgveda*, 'we have no reason to believe that such *corpora aliena* had really been naturalized already in the Ṛgvedic period'. In his view while the names of the priestly families who are attributed the authorship of Books II-VII are Aryan, Kaṇva, attributed authorship of the eighth *maṇḍala*, is

clearly a non-Aryan name and the boar myth, which retains traces of proto-Munda origin, is found exclusively in the hymns of the Kāṇva family. It is also interesting that the mention of cooked rice-milk (*kṣīrapākam odanam*) occurs only twice[32] and in connection with this myth alone. Non-Aryan foreign names are more numerous among the authors of the tenth *maṇḍala* hymns as given in the Anukramaṇī, but the 'aboriginal influence on the Ṛgvedic mythology has hardly been very extensive'.

Thus the long span covered by the composition and compilation of the Ṛgvedic hymns makes it imperative that one tries to distinguish different layers of Ṛgvedic evidence and weigh carefully all the arguments before concluding what constitutes an Indo-European heritage and what cannot be explained in terms of the internal dynamics of Ṛgvedic society, but is to be seen as a borrowing from a non-Aryan source. The problem is compounded by the fact that words change their meanings with the social context and acquire different nuances.[33] Yet Vedic scholarship often suffers from a static viewpoint and looks on changes in later Vedic times as matters of detail alone or as 'ordered development' without any fundamental difference.[34] Recent studies[35] of Vedic ritual have begun to reveal that significant changes in fact took place both in the realm of ideas and practices, that were closely connected with material changes in the life of a semi-nomadic pastoral people who were in the process of making the transition to sedentary life and an agrarian economy. Practices intrinsic to the earlier mode of subsistence received formalization in later Vedic ritual, and analysis of these provides interesting clues to their original significance. It is pointed out that towards the close of the Ṛgvedic period some of the hymns had become unintelligible even to those who had grown in that tradition.[36] If this is the situation in the field of ritual and sacred lore, it is all the more necessary to guard against the temptation of projecting later social and economic features to an earlier past. Emile Benveniste has argued[37] that the notions of 'sale' and 'purchase' emerged among the Indo-Europeans in the context of sale by auction of men who may have been prisoners of war or who may have lost their liberty in gambling. Early Vedic data confirms this.[38] Terms such as *vasna* and *śulka*,

which denote 'price' or 'value' in the *Ṛgveda*,[39] are used not in connection with merchandise or goods but human beings and gods who are modelled after humans. Thus in one place[40] two Dāsas, Varcin and Śambara, are described as *vasnayantā*, 'demanding ransom', apparently for having taken some prisoners of war, and are killed by Indra. Elsewhere[41] *vasna* occurs in the context of a hymnist's bid to sell and repurchase his Indra after the latter has slain the *vṛtras* (demons or enemies) of the one who buys him. The significance of the hymn remains obscure, but the nature of transaction is clearly modelled after the sale and redemption of human beings.[42] In a hymn of the third *maṇḍala* Soma is requested to give salutary food to the devotees and to their 'tethered animals' (*paśave*), which term included bipeds and quadrupeds.[43] References to *ṛṇa* or debt generally pertain to those contracted at dicing and the authors of the *Vedic Index* speak of it as 'a normal condition of Vedic Indians'.[44] It is rightly held[45] that there is no evidence of commercial activities in the *Ṛgveda*. There may have been simple barter of surplus goods, especially to obtain precious metal or 'prestige' goods, but no merchants[46] or intermediaries playing a role in the circulation and production of wealth. Sometimes the Paṇis, described in the *Ṛgveda* as rich, selfish, 'of hostile speech' and greedy, are interpreted as 'merchants par excellence',[47] who practised usury. But this view has no solid basis.[48] One is inclined to agree with Macdonell and Keith that 'it is hardly necessary to do more than regard the Paṇis generally as non-worshippers of the gods favoured by the singers'; the term is wide enough to incorporate aborigines, hostile Aryans, as well as demons.[49]

Thus a more searching and rational interpretation of the Ṛgvedic data does not support Ghurye's view of economy and society in early Vedic times; his assertion that the brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya and vaiśya were already 'almost' castes or class-like categories in Ṛgvedic times[50] cannot be sustained. The problem is viewed from a different perspective by R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar, both of whom look on the society as essentially pastoral. Nevertheless, there are important differences in their views on the extent to which social differentiation had taken place and these are now examined in some detail.

II

Sharma argues that evidence for 'band' organization (a pre-tribal stage in which a group of people not necessarily related by blood come together for food-gathering, hunting or fighting) notwithstanding, Ṛgvedic society on the whole was 'tribal, pastoral and largely egalitarian'.[51] The main source of subsistence was cattle and not agricultural products. Apart from cattle-herding, raids were a major source of livelihood. He quotes the well-known remark of Marx that man-hunting was the logical extension of animal-hunting and contends that the egalitarian ethos of the Ṛgvedic tribes was undermined by the unequal distribution of booty by the tribal chief.[52] The *Ṛgveda* refers to rich people riding in chariots and possessing a large number of cattle; but society was organized neither on differences of wealth nor on the social division of labour. The social structure was kin-based, with kin units of various shapes and sizes depending on the functional requirements.[53] There was a differentiation of ranks, but no class differentiation. In short, this was a pre-state polity, moving gradually towards greater differentiation, as is indicated by the *dānastutis* belonging to the latest stratum of Ṛgvedic literature. These indicate that a major share of the spoils was cornered by chiefs and priests leading to an inequitable redistributive system; but the phenomenon of one class living off the labour of another in 'any considerable degree' was yet to emerge.

In broad outline Sharma's reconstruction of the Ṛgvedic society is plausible. Recently[54] an attempt has been made to reject the economic significance of war and 'booty-production', as Sharma calls it, in Ṛgvedic society on the ground that war could not have been a matter of daily routine. It involved destruction of life and property. Nevertheless, the notion has theoretical as well as data-based support. In their discussion of Greece of the Heroic age Marx and Engels speak[55] of 'military democracy' as a stage when the old gentile system was still full of vigour, but decay had set in and internal warfare had degenerated into systematic raids 'for the purpose of capturing cattle, slaves and treasure as a regular means of gaining a livelihood'. Marshall D. Sahlins

develops this concept further by arguing that the segmentary lineage was an organization of predatory expansion.[56] The term 'segmentary lineage' is the modern anthropological equivalent of the 'gens' in the narratives of Marx and Engels.

The importance of cattle raids is emphasized by Romila Thapar too, and in her monograph *From Lineage to State* she makes a pioneering attempt to apply certain anthropological models and concepts to Ṛgvedic society. She avoids the use of the term "tribal", agreeing with those anthropologists[57] who regard this concept as one of little analytical value. But the alternative 'lineage society' concept that she uses appears no less vague for she stretches it to mean not only a system with lineal descent groups precisely defined—a position she adopts at the beginning of her work—but also clan[58] and other kin-groups, 'lineage society' becoming merely a verbal substitute for 'kin based' or 'tribal' society. A.M. Shah[59] has questioned the validity of the model of 'lineage society' for the Ṛgvedic people from a social-anthropological perspective but has not given particular attention to the allied concept of the lineage mode of production. Shah accepts the data cited by Thapar on the ground that he is not a historian. Yet the very notion of the lineage mode of production as applied by Thapar to Ṛgvedic society is flawed on account of both the imprecise use of the concept and the inaccuracy of the data.

Thapar begins with a precise definition of lineage as given by Middleton and Tait:

> The lineage is a corporate group of unilineal kin with a formalized system of authority. It has rights and duties and accepts genealogical relationships as the binding factor. It can be divided into smaller groups or segments. Several unilineal descent groups go to make up a clan which traces its origin to an actual or mythical ancestor. The basic unit in such a system is the extended family based on a three or four generation lineage controlled by the eldest male who represents it on both ritual and political occasions.[60]

The widest political unit in such a system is called the jural community. Thapar observes:

The jural community takes decisions and is constituted from the dominant authentic lineage segments.... In the lineage mode of production the jural community has some control over production and its inherent exploitative tendencies differentiate it from the more egalitarian bands and ranked society. Exploitation takes the form of those in authority claiming power on the basis of kin connections and wealth and excluding those who are unrelated. *This exclusion could be expressed in non-kin groups labouring for others.*[61] In such a system the produce, whether acquired through labour or from raids, is divided on the basis of redistribution in which voluntary tribute and gift-giving plays a central role. Kinship relations have a genealogical base and at the same time are a unit of production in accordance with lineages, segments and extended families. In a clear separation between elite groups and commoners, kinship constitutes a charter for establishing the authority of the ruling lineage through genealogical connections.[62]

Thapar acknowledges her debt to Emmanuel Terray,[63] who pronounced the concept of the lineage mode of production, and the views of P.P. Rey,[64] Maurice Godelier[65] and Claude Meillassoux,[66] who commented upon it. But it is obvious that her notion of the lineage mode of production is different from theirs. For example, in Terray's model there is no room for the exploitation of 'non-kin groups labouring for the others' while excluded from power and wealth. Both Terray and Meillassoux clearly state that the lineage mode is based on self-subsistence and short-term production techniques. Hence the units of production and consumption are homologous, constituted on the same principles through the same mechanism, and 'exploitation of labour' is conspicuously absent. Terray regards these features as a 'necessary condition for kinship to act as an element in the realization of the mode of production'.[67]

The problem of exploitation within the lineage mode of production is raised and debated in connection with the privileged position of the elders or old men vis-a-vis the junior members of their own lineage, and of men as opposed to women, seen as separate classes for analytical purposes. The question of exploitation pertains more to reproduction than production, and the debate centres on the role of elders in controlling the reproduction of the social structure through their control over

marriage and exchange of women. Differing positions are taken. Whereas some have tried to argue that exploitation as defined by Marx may be seen in these relationships, others have rightly asserted that groups based on the biological phenomena of age and sex can hardly be considered as classes in the same sense as the classes of the proletariat and the capitalist are in industrial society. But nowhere in these discussions is there any mention of the senior ruling lineages of a clan living off the tribute given by the junior lineages or 'commoners' working on clan lands and producing pastoral and agricultural items for the consumption of the former, as is the case with Thapar's paradigm. In other words, whereas the French anthropologists limit social differentiation in lineage society to that between the elders of the lineage and the juniors, Thapar extends it to include distinctly stratified groups of rulers and commoners, the latter being subjected to a form of redistributive exploitation. No wonder that Thapar's narrative leads A.M. Shah to suspect that the warrior group of *rājanyas* and the *viś*-commoners 'were already varṇa-like strata in Ṛgvedic period'.[68]

Thapar's concept of the lineage mode of production has more in common with the paradigm of the 'chiefdom'[69] and 'conical clan'[70] than with the lineage mode of production proposed by Terray. In a chiefdom lineages and not just a few individuals are graded in a hierarchical order and men are 'chiefly' or 'commoner' by birth regardless of their personal capabilities. Sahlins regards this 'a stage beyond primitive equalitarianism', but not yet a class society; 'it is not divided into a ruling stratum in command of the strategic means of production or political coercion and a disenfranchised underclass'.[71] Nevertheless, it has a structure in which rank is linked to descent, real or fictive, and access to wealth and power,or claims to other's services are based on 'familial' priorities.

It has been pointed out[72] that the term *rājanya* does not occur anywhere in the *Ṛgveda* except in the *puruṣasūkta*. This is admittedly a late composition roughly of the same date as later portions of the *Atharvaveda*. The term *rājan*, however, occurs a number of times even in the family books of the *Ṛgveda*, although in most cases it could simply mean the 'effulgent one', as it is

applied to one or the other principal god.[73] At any rate, the occurrence of the term *rājan* in the Ṛgvedic hymns merely shows that the Ṛgvedic clans had 'big men', leaders or chiefs; it does not automatically prove that the *rājans* were representatives of the senior rājanya lineages. A few verses of the tenth *maṇḍala* mention *rājan* in the plural. 'Being foremost may we win the treasures through the chiefs (*rājabhiḥ*) and through our band (of fighters, *vṛjanena*)!'[74] Another verse speaks of the presence of chiefs in the *samiti*, a tribal assembly.[75] But none of these references can be construed to prove the existence of senior lineages existing above the rest of the tribe.[76]

The absence of the term *rājanya*, which means kinsmen of the *rājan*, and as such emphasizes the genealogical link with the chief, is crucial in this respect. Even the term *vaṃśa*, equated by Thapar wih 'lineage', is conspicuous by its absence in the *Ṛgveda*. The term *gotra*, which signifies 'lineage' or 'clan' in later literature, in the *Ṛgveda* generally means 'cowpen' rather than a patrilineal descent group. Besides, in Thapar's opinion the *gotra* system was specific to brāhmaṇas and the brāhmaṇas were an 'addendum' to the Aryan lineage society consisting of the *rājanyas* and the *viś*, the so-called senior and junior lineages. The institution of lineage in that case would be without any identification mark in the *Ṛgveda*.

To support her thesis Thapar produces evidence not from the *Ṛgveda*, but almost entirely from the later Vedic texts,[77] particularly the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. The only Ṛgvedic hymn cited in support of the view that 'those who chose the *rājā* are distinct from the *viś*'[78] is X.173.1. A close examination clearly shows that no such inference can be drawn on the basis of this verse in which the priest pronounces, 'I have consecrated thee (*rājā*), come amongst us, be steady and unvacillating; may all these subject desire thee (for their king) (*viśastvā sarvā vāñchantu*), may the kingdom (or rulership? *rāṣṭram*) never fall from thee!'[79]

Another argument put forward in support of the view that 'the possessors of wealth were distinguished from the rest of the tribe' is based on a misunderstanding of some data produced by H.W. Bailey.[80] Thapar writes[81] that Bailey's analysis 'leads him

to state that *ārya* referred to the owner or possessor of wealth', but in fact Bailey attributes this meaning to the Indo-Iranian *árya* or *aryá* and not to the elongated *ārya.* He states that the term *árya* (with a short 'a') was too narrow to denote an ethnic name, but was suitable for a rich class like the vaiśya in India and is explained as such in the *Nighaṇṭu* (II.6) and Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (III.1.103).[82] He further adds that *árya* came to have the secondary meaning of 'well-born' or 'noble' in an ethical sense. In other words, according to Bailey, *árya* originally denoted a nobleman who 'possessed wealth' but later came to mean one who had noble virtues. The elongated *ārya* derived by *vṛddhi* from *árya* meant 'connected with nobles'. Bailey clearly states that as far as *ārya* is concerned, an 'early meaning connected with nobles' has thus derived to an ethnic name and to non-ethnic use'. Thus Bailey connects *ārya* with the secondary meaning of *árya* and not with its primary meaning of 'owner, possessor of wealth'. Thapar is confused about this distinction. She then proceeds to argue that since in these texts the term 'Ārya' means a possessor of wealth, or member of a nobility, this meaning is apparently a survival from Ṛgvedic times, and Ārya in the *Ṛgveda* constituted a nobility distinct from the ordinary tribesmen-commoners. Thus she concludes that the term 'Ārya' was related to 'social status and wealth and not to race'.

Bailey's interpretation of *árya*-and *daha*-is connected with his vision of the Āryan Great House, *árya* (with a short 'a') was the 'possessor', 'holder of property' contrasting neatly with the Iranian *daha*-or old Indian Dāsa meaning 'servant' or 'the subservient one'. Yet the 'vision of Zoroaster', as he calls it, may not reflect the society of Ṛgvedic India, for the *Avesta* is far removed from the *Ṛgveda* in point of time. Bailey does not take into account the changes that may have taken place by the end of the early Vedic phase, and his thesis rests on projecting backward notions found in later texts.

Nevertheless, Bailey's tracing of Ṛgvedic Dāsa and Dasyu to the Indo-Iranian base *das/daha* is convincing. In ancient Iranian *daha* means 'man', and *dahyu* 'land' or 'country'. *Daha* as the ethnic name of a people is mentioned in an inscription of Xerxes, and Bailey cites several examples of words meaning 'man' or

'hero' giving rise to ethnic names. *Dahyu*, which must have designated the habitat of the Daha, became 'Dasyu' in the *Ṛgveda* and referred to hostile Iranians, who were regarded as barbarians and outsiders.[83] This suggests that the Dāsas and Dasyus represented an earlier wave of the Aryans.[84] It is held that the term *anās*, applied to the Dasyus in the *Ṛgveda*, V.20.10, does not mean 'noseless' or 'flat-nosed' as was once thought, but 'without a mouth', implying merely that these people spoke an alien language (not necessarily non-Aryan), and were described contemptuously.[85] Even the epithet *mṛdhravācaḥ* applied to Dasyus[86] may not indicate their non-Aryan character, for it is applied to Pūrus[87] too, and evidently means 'speakers of a corrupt or evil tongue'. Nevertheless, the *Ṛgveda* speaks twice[88] of people of black skin (*tvacaṃ kṛṣṇam*) and at least in one of these the succeeding verse clearly shows that the Dasyus are meant. In another place[89] Indra, the destroyer of forts (*purandara*), is said to have scattered the black-wombed (*kṛṣṇayoniḥ*) (fortresses) of the Dāsas and it is possible to see in it a reference to the dark skin of the Dāsas. It is suggested[90] that the Dāsas and Dasyus were a pre-Ṛgvedic group of Indo-Aryan speakers and had come in contact with the people of the Harappa Culture. There had been a racial and cultural fusion which explains the dark skin colour of the Dāsas. According to another view, at least some of the Dasyus were Austro-Asiatics.[91] A strong ethnic contrast between the Ārya and the Dāsa-Dasyu peoples is indicated by *Ṛgveda*, V.30.9, which informs us that 'the Dāsa made women his weapons' (*striyo hi dāsa āyudhāni cakre*). Consequently Indra remarks, 'What can his feeble (*abalā*) army (*senāḥ*) do to me', and we are told that 'having discovered the two female breasts of this one, (Indra) advanced to fight the Dasyu'. This verse reflects the contempt of the patriarchal Aryans for the Dāsas and Dasyus whose armies contained women warriors. This is confirmed by another verse in which Indra asserts that without a fight he will divide the riches of his adversary, who has come with women (*strībhiḥ*) to fight here.[92] Apparently among the Dāsas and Dasyus women took part in warfare. They may have had certain matriarchal traits. The *Ṛgveda* mentions[93] only one woman warrior, Viśpalā, who lost her leg in a 'battle of thousand

combats' (*sahasramīḷha*), elsewhere called Khela's battle.[94] The twin gods Aśvins gave her a metal leg at the prayer of Agastya, enabling her to move about again. This event was important enough to be celebrated in a number of hymns.[95] Do we have here a myth of Dāsa origins foisted upon the Aśvins? It appears significant that the myth is mentioned only in the first and tenth *maṇḍalas.*

However, whatever the ethnic identity[96] of the Dāsas and the Dasyus, differences between them and the Ṛgvedic Aryans are clearly ethnic at least in the initial stages and not a matter of social hierarchy differentiating between the possessors and the non-possessors.[97] Prayers for the killing of Ārya as well as Dāsa enemies, and references to the fort of Dāsas[98] indicate that the Ārya and the Dāsa were two distinct ethnic groups and not parts of one civil stratified society.[99] It is only towards the end of the Ṛgvedic period that the Dāsa is completely subjected, enslaved and assimilated, and the term begins to mean a slave.[100]

III

Clear evidence for a threefold social differentiation comes from Book VIII of the *Ṛgveda* where a prayer is offered to the Aśvins to 'promote (*jinvatam)* our *brahma* (prayer) and animate our thoughts, kill the demons (*rākṣaṃsi*) and drive away disease ... promote our *kṣatra* (ruling power), promote our heroes (*nṝn*), kill the demons and drive away disease ... promote our milch-kine (*dhenurjinvatam*), promote our *viśaḥ*, kill the demons and drive away disease'.[101] Here we see a tripartite functional division, presumably in hierarchical order. The term varṇa is not used in this context. The *Ṛgveda* knows of only two varṇas, the Ārya and the Dāsa; as Kane holds, varṇa means 'colour' or 'light' in most passages of the *Ṛgveda* and 'both the Āryas and Dāsas were designated varṇas on account of the colour of their skins'.[102] In one place[103] Dāsa is opposed to *varṇam,* which is used to signify the Āryans apparently in allusion to their good colour or complexion.[104] However, elsewhere varṇa is qualified by *dāsam* and Indra is praised for having placed the Dāsa varṇa in a low hiding place (*adharam guhākaḥ*).[105]

Dumezil[106] and Benveniste[107] have argued that priests, warriors and commoners formed three distinct social groups among the Indo-Iranian and early Vedic people and the tripartite social order was a characteristic of Indo-European societies. However, as G.S. Kirk remarks, although the division itself is 'hardly surprising', the most prominent Indo-European culture, the Greek, 'is an embarrassing exception to the tripartite division of functions. The division simply does not occur at least in any form specific enough to be significant in Greek culture and mythology.'[108] On the other hand, John Brough has shown that such a threefold division may be seen in Semitic societies portrayed in the Old Testament.[109] Bruce Lincoln argues[110] that the third functional category is too general to be regarded as a specialized vocation and is tantamount to 'commoners'; and as far as the distinction between priestly and warrior classes is concerned, it is found among the pastoral Nilotic tribes of East Africa too, with priests enjoying a hierarchical superiority over warriors. Lincoln asserts that the separation of priestly and warrior groups has its roots in the ecology of the religion of cattle keepers, and goes on to build a paradigm of binary oppositions in the organization of Indo-Aryan society.[111]

However, building paradigms on inadequate and misunderstood data is risky. Lincoln rests his theory on a separation of priestly and warrior groups among ancient Indo-Iranians that is projected to the level of the gods: in the dichotomy between what he terms as the 'sovereign gods', the *asuras* (Skt *asura* = Av. *ahura-*) and 'warrior-gods', the *daivas* (Skt *deva* = Av. *daeva-* Old Persian *daiva*). Among the celestial sovereigns described as *asuras* were the sky-god Dyaus, the dual deity Mitra-Varuṇa, the Ādityas and the demiurge Tvaṣṭṛ. Among the warrior gods (*devas*) the most important was Indra. Others were Vāyu, the personification of wind, the Maruts and the Rudras. However, recent research[112] has exposed the fallacy of the dichotomy of *deva* versus *asura* in Indo-Iranian times. Indra, regarded as a *deva* by Lincoln, being the warrior-god *par excellence*, is designated as *asura* no less than four times;[113] and at least in nine hymns of the *Ṛgveda* he is described as having the qualities of an *asura*.[114] That does not compare unfavourably with Varuṇa

who is ranked as the chief 'celestial sovereign', an *asura*, by Lincoln. He is called an *asura* about five times[115] and the derivatives *asuryām* and *asura* are applied to him in two verses.[116] In some hymns the dual divinity Mitra-Varuṇa is called *asura* or attributed the quality of asuraship.[117] But so too with Rudra[118] and the Maruts,[119] who in the opinion of Lincoln are projections of earthly warrior bands at the divine level.[120] Expressions such as *devānāṃ asurā*,[121] *asuras* of the gods, and *mahad-devānāmasuratvamekam*,[122] 'great is the unique asuraship of the gods', would be difficult to explain if *devas* and *asuras* represented two mutually exclusive groups of deities belonging to different cycles of myth-making. In fact, in a Ṛgvedic hymn Rudra is called both *deva* and *asura* at the same time.[123] Hale is right in asserting that initially *asura* meant simply a 'lord',[124] human or divine, and also applied to the human adversaries of Indra such as Varcin,[125] Pipru[126] and Vṛkadvara.[127] Some of these are also identified as Dāsas.[128] But later when the historical nature of Indra's conflict with these human *asuras* was forgotten and it was attributed a mythological meaning, the term *asura* acquired a pejorative sense and began to signify a demon. Popular etymology took it to be a negative word and even invented its positive counterpart *sura*, meaning god.[129] Hale thinks that the semantic changes in *deva/daiva* and *asura/ahura* in India and Iran were independent of each other, and his suggestion deserves further scrutiny. There appears to have been some infiltration of old Iranian ideas in later Vedic times,[130] but Hale has established quite convincingly that the *asura/deva* dichotomy cannot be traced back to Ṛgvedic times.

Benveniste found that although both the ancient Iranian as well as the Homeric languages draw upon Indo-European lexical roots to form words designating family, clan, tribe, etc., they are not identical and show independent development.[131] It follows that each Indo-European language group came to evolve social institutions in its own specific manner and drew upon Indo-European roots to formulate the requisite words,but there could be no uniformity in this respect. The hypothesis of an Indo-European heritage would not be adequate to explain the existence or non-existence of characteristic social groupings or

units of social organization. The *Ṛgveda* does indicate the existence of a functional grouping of priests and warriors and the evolution of an embryonic priesthood into a full-fledged specialized class of priests, but as Benveniste remarks, this grouping was not on a 'political' basis, or genealogically determined. Social organization proper rested on a different type of classification, that of family, clan, tribe and country in the the manner of concentric circles. The problem of social stratification, on the other hand, is linked with the emergence of a specialized priestly class among the Vedic people.

There is evidence to show that although the ritual of *yajña* goes back to Indo-European times, the function of priesthood was not confined to any particular person, family or lineage. In several hymns men in general are said to be offering oblations and performing the sacrifice.[132] At one place the Five Tribes or *pañca janāḥ* are credited with bringing sacrifice to Agni.[133] It is interesting that the plural of the words 'Bharata' and 'Kuru' are given as synonyms of the term *ṛtvij* in the *Nighaṇṭu,*[134] and *ṛtvij* in Vedic Sanskrit meant 'sacrificing at the proper season or regularly'.[135] It seems to have been the earliest term used for a priest who officiated at a sacrifice. It has its cognate *rathwi* in the *Avesta* and may have Indo-European roots. The mention of the Bharatas and the Kurus as synonyms of *ṛtvij* in the traditional list of words culled from the Saṃhitās is rightly taken to indicate that at one time any member of these tribes could perform priestly functions.[136] Some of the Śrautasūtras mention a variety of the Dvādaśāha sacrifice, the Bharata Dvādaśāha, apparently named after the Bharata *jana* or its eponymous founder. We are informed that the Dvādaśāha can be an *ahīna* as well as a *sattra*; the difference between the two types of sacrifice lies in the fact that a *sattra* can be performed only by brāhmaṇas but any of the three upper varṇas can perform *ahīna.*[137] However, both involve group participation. In our opinion this distinction is of later origin, created with the crystallization of the varṇa system to explain away the earlier practice which may have continued among the Bharatas. In the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, the Bharatas and the Kurus appear as kṣatriya clans, but traces of the earlier custom survive in the story of Devāpi and Śantanu.

The *Ṛgveda* speaks of Devāpi as the *hotṛ*[138] of Śantanu and the *purohita* (chief priest) who invoked the gods to release the rains. Yāska[139] tells us that Devāpi was the elder brother of Śantanu and had gone to the forest to practise austerities when his younger brother, taking advantage of his absence, usurped the throne. This annoyed the gods who withheld the rains. Śantanu then requested Devāpi to accept the kingdom, but the latter refused and propitiated the gods on behalf of his younger brother acting as his priest. The story is repeated[140] in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, the *Mahābhārata* and several Purāṇas, which invent various devices to account for the unusual practice of a Kuru 'prince' acting as the priest of his brother, but the contrived effort of the later sources to explain away Devāpi's role as the priest of his brother indicates that the legend had a basis in fact and had to be explained away in the changed conditions when the priesthood had become the exclusive function of a hereditary class.

The case of Devāpi and Śantanu is not the only instance of its kind. The *Ṛgveda* records another,which has somehow escaped the attention of scholars. Devaśravas and Devavāta, regarded as composers of the twenty-third hymn of the third *maṇḍala* and described as Bharatas (belonging to the Bharata *jana)* in the hymn, are said to have been brothers. As the name of Devaśravas is given precedence[141] over Devavāta, it may be presumed that Devaśravas was the older. The next verse urges Devaśravas to praise Agni Daivavāta, that is, the sacrificial fire of Devavāta, which is called 'the lord of the people', *janānāmasad vaśī.* In my opinion, the sacrificial fire of the tribe was generally identified by the name of the tribal chief and hence in this case we find that Devavāta, the younger brother, was acting as the tribal chief while his elder brother officiated as his priest. *Agniṃ daivavātam* of the verse cited here may be compared with the expression *daivadāso agniḥ*,[142] fire of Divodāsa, occurring elsewhere. In another context the fire of Divodāsa is called *satpati*, the lord of his band.[143] It is significant that Divodāsa, too, was a chief of the Bhāratas. Agni is often called *bhārata* after the name of the eponymous founder chief of the Bharatas.[144] The sacrificial fire of Trasadasyu of the Pūru line, too, is called the *trasadasyavam.*[145] It was customary to describe the sacrificial fire

of the clan by the name of the chief and Devavāta was the clan chief. The hymn speaks of him as kindling the sacrificial fire assisted by his elder brother Devaśravas, who acted as his priest.

Although traditionally both Devaśravas and Devavāta are regarded as brothers and composers of the hymn, only the name of Devaśravas appears in the list of the Pravara *ṛṣis* of the family of the Viśvāmitras given in the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*.[146] On the other hand, the *Ṛgveda* speaks of Śṛñjaya, the son of Devavāta, too, as a warrior chief. He is described as kindling the fire, which in ancient times was kindled by Devavāta.[147] Śṛñjaya, the son of Devavāta, defeated the Vṛcīvants.[148] These references indicate that at least in some cases succession to chiefship was hereditary. The trend crystallized by later Vedic times and in later Vedic texts[149] the Śṛñjayas and the Kurus are mentioned together as kṣatriya lineages. But the earlier kinship of chief and priest is reflected in a hymn which describes the descendants of Viśvāmitra, the famous priest of the Bharatas, as *bharatasya putrāḥ*, sons of the eponymous Bharata.[150] Another Vedic seer Parucchepa, author of a number of hymns of the first *maṇḍala*, describes himself as the clansman of Divodāsa,[151] the chief of the Bharatas. It thus appears that at least among the Bharatas the priest and the chief initially belonged to the same clan. I would suggest that this lies at the root of the Purāṇic myth about Viśvāmitra's birth as a kṣatriya prince and his becoming a brāhmaṇa sage by practising severe austerities.

It may be argued that although at some remote period participation in the *yajña* may have been an egalitarian communal activity, as is suggested by *sattra/ahīna* sacrifices, the examples of Devāpi-Śantanu and Devaśravas-Devavāta suggest that the office of the priest and the chief inhered in certain privileged families,[152] which may have enjoyed higher status, as is the case in many tribal societies. Indeed the *Ṛgveda* in four instances applies the epithet *sujāta* meaning 'well-born' to men who are variously called *sūris*,[153] *naras*[154] and *vīras*[155] and are described as sitting together and tending sacrificial fire. However, *sujāta* in these passages need not necessarily mean 'high born' or 'noble lineage',[156] as believed by Griffith; it may in a physical sense mean 'well-built', 'beautiful', 'well-grown', 'tall', etc. Thus it is

said for the son of Purūravas and Urvaśī that 'from the waters be born a strong, young (*sujāta*) hero (*naryuḥ*)'.[157] Agni is called *sujāta* a number of times,[158] and is once expressly described as 'well-born' (*tanvā sujāta*).[159] Elsewhere the 'pure ones' (*śucayaḥ*), apparently the Maruts, are said to have made their bodies well-developed (*tanvāḥ sujātaḥ*) by worshipping Agni, thus exchanging their perishable bodies for immortal ones.[160] Apart from Agni and the Maruts, several other gods, too, such as Mitra,[161] Varuṇa,[162] Aryaman,[163] Bhaga[164] and Indra[165] are called *sujāta* and so are the goddesses Aditi,[166] Rodasi[167] and Uṣā.[168] But there is no doubt that the poets had in mind the well-formed physical appearance of these deities and not their 'noble ancestry'.

References to *kṣatra* and kṣatriya in the Ṛgvedic hymns have often led to the conceptualization of a 'warrior aristocracy' or 'nobility' going back to proto-Indo-European times.[169] Nevertheless, it is rightly held[170] that in this text *kṣatra* stands for 'valour' and 'kṣatriya' for 'ruler' or authority, human or divine.[171] It is almost synonymous with *rājan*, but emphasizes the fighting qualities of the individual, who was no mere warrior but a person of high rank fighting along with the other members of his clan. Ordinary fighters are designated as *balam*, that is, force. There is hardly any evidence of 'kṣatriya' being used to denote a compact group, class or caste in the *Ṛgveda*. It is significant that when the varṇa/caste structure emerges, it is initially *rājanya*, emphasizing kinship with the *rājan*, and not 'kṣatriya' that denotes the second varṇa. Replacement of '*rājanya*' with 'kṣatriya' in the varṇa scheme is symptomatic of a horizontal and perhaps also vertical widening of the exploitative social order, in terms of space as well as people.

It is held that the Ṛgvedic *rājan* was a tribal chief whose functions were largely confined to providing protection to his clan and its cattle and leadership in wars and cattle raids.[172] He also distributed[173] booty or spoils of cattle raids, apparently retaining a larger share for himself. That there were persons who possessed more wealth than others is indicated by the term *maghavan*. *Sūri* was another term of distinction and is often interpreted in the sense of 'chief'. However, Potdar points out[174]

that in the prayers when long life is expected the term *sūri* is used, but when food or wealth is prayed for *maghavan* is used. Both figure as the patrons of priests. In several verses the term *asura*, too, closely approximates to the Ṛgvedic *rājan*. Asuraship and *kṣatra* are attained simultaneously in some cases,[175] and in one hymn the *asura* of the people is also described as the 'distributor'.[176] *Asura* has his own *vīras* (*asurasya vīraḥ*).[177] Hale's conclusions are worth noting. In his view in the earlier portions of the *Ṛgveda* a man was an *asura* not by birth or qualities but became so 'by the consent and support of those who followed him'. He was a chief or 'lord' with some kind of military force at his command.[178]

Whereas *asura*, *maghavan*, *sūri* and *rājan* are all terms indicating high rank, warriors in general are *naras* or *vīras/suvīras*, which mean powerful men or heroes.[179] Apparently war was mainly the concern of young men of the patriarchal Aryan tribes. Lincoln draws[180] attention to two interesting terms signifying warrior bands, *marya*[181] and *vṛka*, which have their correspondence in the ancient Iranian *yasnas*. Literally, the former meant 'young man' and the latter 'wolf'. This was particularly significant in the context of cattle-raids, since the warrior had to be a ruthless predator. The warrior band had its own characteristic emblems such as the mace (*vajra*) and banner (*dhvaja* or *drapsa*).[182] Lincoln even suggests that the warrior had to go through some form of initiation. None the less, he admits that it is not clear whether these bands were organized as 'age-sets, secret societies, or along wholly different lines', although the fact that the Maruts are all of the same age would point to an age-set organization.[183] The emphasis on youth would tend to make their recruitment open and not confined to certain so-called *rājanya* lineages, especially as demographically it was still a small-scale society praying for ever for the increase of its manpower.

The overall impression created by the Ṛgvedic data is that ranks were not closed and anyone could aspire to become a priest or a warrior chief. In an often quoted verse the poet says: 'A bard am I, my dad (*tataḥ*) is a leech, mommy (*nanā*) lays corn upon the stones. Striving for wealth, with varied plans, we follow our

desires like kine.'[184] In the earlier third *maṇḍala* (43.5) a poet addresses Indra: 'Would you make me a protector (*gopa*) of the people (*janasya*), their ruler (*rājānam*), O conquering Maghavan? Or would you make me a *ṛṣi* having drunk the *soma* juice? Or would you give me everlasting wealth?' Such general statements may not tell us much about the organizational structure of Ṛgvedic tribes, but the lack of rigid demarcation between social echelons suggests that although the social organization had progressed beyond a purely egalitarian stage, it was by no means stratified. Ranks were still largely a matter of achievement rather than inheritance, although descent had begun to count. References to Kuśikas, Viśvāmitras, Vasiṣṭhas and Kāṇvas in the plural suggest families or clans engaged in priestly functions through generations, but all such references need not be interpreted as speaking of priestly lineages exclusively. As we shall presently see, the Bhṛgus—and perhaps the Aṅgirasas too—were initially a 'whole tribe' rather than priestly lineages. It is held that the names of many a tribe now survive only in brāhmaṇa *gotras*. Nevertheless, claims of descent from ancient sages who had already achieved a mythical, semi-divine status would confer high prestige and additional advantage and at one place the Ṛgvedic poet claims a hereditary gift of poetry. 'On account of our descent from our ancient father (*pituḥ*), we are speaking; our tongue, when we behold the Soma, stirs itself.'[185] As rituals became more specialized and knowledge of them secret, the trend would be towards the growth of a hereditary priestly class. The process is still in its formative stages in the *Ṛgveda* and hence we find a fluid social situation.

IV

The question arises: what was the process which led to a precise defining and institutionalization of statuses, their crystallization into varṇa categories? D.D. Kosambi was of the view that the brāhmaṇa varṇa with its *gotra* organization developed as 'a result of interaction between the Aryan priesthood and the ritually superior priesthood of the Indus Culture'.[186] The survivors of the Harappa Culture were absorbed at various levels in the

composite Aryan society, which evolved a fourfold varṇa structure as a consequence. Most crucial was the assimilation of the Harappan priesthood. Small groups of pre-Aryan priests joined the conquering Aryan patriarchal clan-groups offering them their priestly services. This resulted in these priestly groups adopting the same clan name as that of their patrons, which would explain the survival of Vedic clan names (for example, Vikarṇa, Matsya, Kutsa, Vītahavya, etc.) among the brahmanical *gotras* listed in the Śrautasūtras and the *Matsya Purāṇa*. The recombined priesthood transformed the original Vedic priesthood, accelerating its separation from the kṣatriya elite, a structural development which was parallel to the emergence of the Dāsa/śūdra caste and led to endogamy.[187] Individual property had not developed sufficiently among the nomadic pastoral Aryans. The subjugated Harappan agrarian population (identified as Dāsas by Kosambi), therefore, belonged to the conquering tribes as a whole constituting a separate group. This was the origin of a Dāsa/śūdra varṇa and an endogamous caste system.

Kosambi's thesis is brilliant and persuasive and although some of his arguments appear far-fetched, unlike Ghurye he tries to provide a rational explanation of the origin of the brahmanical *gotras*. Thapar acknowledges[188] her indebtedness to Kosambi in drawing her model of 'lineage society' in which the brāhmaṇa and the śūdra are treated as addenda; but she ignores the most important aspect of his thesis, which explains the internal stratification of the Aryan tribes as the outcome of the formation of a Dāsa/śūdra varṇa, the 'surplus producing labour', and the assimilation of the Aryan and the pre-Aryan priesthood resulting in the separation of brahmana and ksatriya, a social pattern reflected in the hymns of the *Yajurveda* of the later Vedic phase and not in the *Ṛgveda* (with the exception of the *puruṣasūkta*).

We need not rule out survival of some Harappan elements or their assimilation in the expanding Aryan society, but Kosambi's assumption that the 'priest class of the Aryan conquerors was largely recruited from the conquered'[189] is not convinicing. Some Vedic sages such as Kavaṣa Ailūṣa and Dīrghatamas are said to have been *dāsīputras*, sons of Dāsa women, but the identification of the Dāsas with the people of the Harappa Culture remains

problematic, and Kosambi's view that of the seven sages regarded as the primary founders of the brahmanical *gotra*-lineages (Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Bharadvāja, Gautama, Atri, Vasiṣṭha and Kaśyapa),[190] Viśvāmitra was 'the one real indubitable Aryan' and the rest non-Aryans, is pure sepculation. We do not know why Bhṛgu, the father of Jamadagni, is given a secondary position in the *gotra* lists, but so also is Kuśika, the father of Viśvāmitra. Perhaps Kosambi's reason[191] for regarding the Bhṛgu-Jamadagnis as non-Aryans is that in the battle of 'ten kings' the Bhṛgus appear as the enemies of Sudās, the leader of the Tṛtsus, whom Indra, 'the friend of the Aryans', helps.[192] But the hostility of Indra is not certain evidence for a non-Aryan identity, for at several places Indra is praised for having killed Aryan enemies.[193] Kosambi is of course right in regarding the Bhṛgus as 'a complete tribe' in the *Ṛgveda* with a full range of activities including warfare, chariot manufacture and pottery—expertise in the latter accounting for the word *bhārgava*, meaning potter, both in Sanskrit and Pali. It is apparent that because of this multi-dimensionality of the Bhṛgus, Macdonell and Keith could not decide whether they are priests or warriors.[194]

Traditionally the Aṅgirases are closely associated with the Bhṛgus. Two of the primary *gotrakāras*, Bharadvāja and Gautama, figure as Aṅgirases in the *gotra* lists, and Vāmadeva, attributed authorship of the fourth *maṇḍala*, speaks of Gotama as his father. In several hymns Aṅgirases are described mystically as *virūpas* (having various forms) and sons of god (*devaputra, divas putrāso*).[195] But in one hymn[196] they appear as the patrons of Viśvāmitra and are said to have prolonged their life by giving him rich gifts at the thousandfold *soma* pressings, that is, the horse sacrifice. The verses[197] that follow make it clear that it was the horse sacrifice of Sudās, the chief of the Bharatas, at which the Kuśikas officiated. Viśvāmitra offered prayer to Indra for the protection of the Bharata *jana*. Thus, at least in this hymn the Aṅgirases are closely allied to the Bharatas, if not identified with them, and are patrons bestowing riches on Viśvāmitra and not officiating priests. There is little indicative of a non-Aryan origin.

Kosambi regards the myth of the miraculous birth of Vasiṣṭha[198] in the seventh *maṇḍala* as a sure sign of his adoption into an

Aryan lineage;he argues that the fact that Vasiṣṭha was adopted, not in the Kuśika *gotra*, 'the gens of the original tribal priest Viśvāmitra', but into the Tṛtsu-Bharata tribe, shows that 'Brahmanism was foreign to the original Aryan system'; for Viśvāmitra, though a priest, was not the first brāhmaṇa. He was a kṣatriya who attained brāhmaṇahood by practising severe austerities according to later legends, which speak of his rivalry with Vasiṣṭha. It is Vasiṣṭha who is the first brāhmaṇa.[199] Here Kosambi seems to imply that the very idea of a separate brāhmaṇa varṇa was borrowed from the Harappa culture. This goes against his own view that the beginnings of the varṇa/caste organization are to be traced to changes in relations of production and the formation of a servile class of Dāsa/śūdra varṇa. 'Dāsa' in fact became a servile category after the defeat of the Dāsas at the hands of the Ṛgvedic Aryans. It was not a continuation of their pre-existing position in an earlier network of production relations. The *Ṛgveda* knows of several Dāsa chiefs whose wealth was coveted by the Aryans. Besides, even if it is granted that Vasiṣṭha was a pre-Aryan priest patronized by the Bharatas, it would not explain the puzzling feature of endogamy; for the Viśvāmitras and the Vasiṣṭhas, the so-called Aryan and pre-Aryan priests of Kosambi's thesis, assimilate to form one endogamous caste unit having exogamous *gotras* or clans within it. In the *gotra* system of the brāhmaṇas the Viśvāmitras occupy a considerable space and endogamy does not mark them off from the Vasiṣṭhas; they together form a single whole, constituting one varṇa, separated from other occupational groups which crystallize into distinct varṇas and endogamous units. It is possible to argue that the description of Vasiṣṭha as the 'first brāhmaṇa' is in the sense of his being the foremost, or alternatively that it is an allusion to his having been the first of those who were later designated *brāhmaṇācchaṃsin* and mentioned simply as the 'brāhmaṇa' in *Ṛgveda* I.15.5, since he was allotted the special cup called *'brāhmaṇa'* for drinking *soma.*[200] The assimilation and accommodation of aboriginal priests within the framework of the brāhmaṇa varṇa is a process which has taken place throughout the period of expansion of the caste system, but the emergence of endogamous subcastes

within the brāhmaṇa varṇa is a post-Vedic, presumably early medieval, phenomenon. Ethnic repulsion or isolation does not explain the emergence of an endogamous brāhmaṇa varṇa in the Vedic period. If there was assimilation of the Aryan and the pre-Aryan at the level of priesthood, there are stronger grounds to hold that there was assimilation at the levels of ruling lineages, the *viś* and the śūdras too. But this would not explain the origin of the varṇa system and endogamy. In our opinion endogamy should be seen as an extreme manifestation of class and gender exploitation which go together in the caste system. The system has adopted certain primitive religio-social notions of commensality and connubium to serve its own end.[201]

Identifying specific items of the socio-cultural milieu of Vedic and post-Vedic times as survivals of the Harappa Culture is a hazardous exercise. It is worthwhile to keep in mind the remark of Stuart Piggott, 'the observational data of prehistory seem to me in almost every way to be more ambiguous and more capable of varied interpretations than the normal run of material available to historians'.[202] Theories regarding the socio-political organization of the Harappans often use the same artifacts to arrive at contradictory conclusions.[203] As for religion, Kosambi did not have the advantage of the excavation reports of Kalibangan (Rajasthan) and Lothal (Gujarat), which have brought to light the existence of fire-altars and a fire-ritual in the Harappan cultural milieu. But it is pertinent that none of the north-western sites of the Harappa Culture such as Mohenjo-daro, Harappa or Chanhu-daro provide any indication of a fire-cult. The regional divergence may be explained as due to some intrusive Indo-Iranian or Aryan elements meeting the Harappan people which resulted in a cultural synthesis, but is not sufficient to warrant the supposition that Harappan priests took charge of the Aryan fire-ritual and played a key role in the social and religious reorganization of the Ṛgvedic Aryans. Marshall's hypothesis[204] that the Harappans worshipped the female-principle Śakti in the form of a mother-goddess, as well as the male principle, the prototype of god Śiva, in both their anthropomorphic as well as aniconic forms, has been widely accepted without critical evaluation, and elaborate theories have been built on the

assumption that the Harappan religion was a direct progenitor of Hinduism. Thus Wheeler,[205] while implicitly accepting Marshall's interpretation of the data, hypothesized that the cult of the mother-goddess was observed by the lower classes and the higher classes worshipped the male deity, the 'proto-Śiva' represented on the seals. It is interesting that the case for the 'proto-Śiva' identification rests on the interpretation of a single seal found at Mohenjo-daro by Marshall.Two others discovered by Mackay[206] and regarded by him as similar to the 'proto-Śiva' seal show important variations. The figure on the first wears a buffalo-horn headdress, numerous bracelets and, according to Marshall, has three faces and is ithyphallic; but these features are absent on the other two. Referring to the views of various archaeologists and historians, Ghurye shows that there is no unanimity of opinion about the last mentioned two features and concludes[207] that not only is the 'so-called ithyphallism of the figure almost a fiction or an act of imagination' but the ascription of three faces to is unwarranted. He also draws attention to the fact that whereas the historic Śiva is closely connected with the bull, this animal is conspicuously absent among the animals surrounding the deity on the seal. Thus, Ghurye is justified in rejecting the thesis of the Harappan origin of the Śiva-cult.

More than a decade earlier, H.P. Sullivan[208] had questioned Marshall's identification and assumptions regarding Harappan religion. He is quite emphatic that the figure on the Mohenjo-daro seal is neither ithyphallic nor three-headed; it is in fact a female deity, the same great goddess of vegetation and fertility who manifested herself in the sacred tree and is shown wearing a three-pointed headdress. He points out that Marshall himself had admitted that what appeared to him to be an erect phallus could be in reality the end of the waistband. In Sullivan's view waistbands and girdles are found only on female figurines and arm bangles and necklaces adorn lavishly the female figures in Harappan art. According to him, the coif and the pigtail worn by the two other so-called 'proto-Śiva' figures resemble those worn by the female figurines and there is scant evidence of the worship of a male deity in the Harappa culture. The identification of the numerous conical stones found at the Indus sites as phallus or

liṅga is also doubtful and it has been rightly held that even if 'phallus worship' is assumed to have been a part of the Harappan religion it would not prove the prevalence of Śiva-worship, for Śiva's connection with the *liṅga* symbol is post-Vedic and perhaps later than the second century BC.

Thus the arguments of Sullivan and Ghurye sufficiently demonstrate the fallacy of broad generalizations in the sphere of religious beliefs and practices on the basis of a few material artifacts of doubtful import. Those who trace the epic-Purāṇic cults of Śiva and Śakti as well as the caste system to the Harappa period ignore the fact that the cults of both these deities appear to have been originally hostile to brahmanism and the varṇa system. Both Śiva and the mother goddess Durgā-Śakti make a late entry into the brahmanical pantheon. The story of Śiva's destruction of the *yajña* sacrifice of Dakṣa-Prajāpati and his non-inclusion among the gods who receive a share of *yajña*-offerings clearly establishes his anti-brahmanical antecedents. Similarly the worship of the mother goddess in Indian villages retains traces of an earlier tradition when it was free of varṇa bias. Thus it is difficult to maintain that the roots of these anti-brahmanical cults as well as of the varṇa system go back to the Indus civilization, and were later manipulated by the brāhmaṇa priests through religion and ritual. A more reasoned approach would be to look for explanations in the internal dynamics of the Ṛgvedic society.[209]

V

The development of a powerful priesthood and the formation of the brāhmaṇa varṇa may not be simply a case of ethnic predisposition; greater availability of surplus and enforced leisure are necessary conditions for the proliferation of rituals and the growth of a class of specialists who first establish their control over the great fertility rites and then assume the role of intermediaries between clans and ancestors and deities. The process may be seen in the *Ṛgveda*. It is generally held that the earliest terms to denote a priestly functionary are *ṛtvij* and *hotṛ*, both with cognates in the *Avesta* as *Rathwi* and *Zaotar*. The former

term is connected with seasonal sacrifices offered at regular intervals and we have already shown that initially the function of the *ṛtvij* was not confined to any priestly lineage. These sacrifices were perhaps performed collectively by the tribe hence the Bharata tribe as a whole could be known as *ṛtvij.*[210] Later, *ṛtvij* became the general designation for a priest officiating at a sacrifice.[211] A similar development occurs in the case of the *hotṛ.* The word derives from an Indo-European root *hu* meaning 'to pour'. Thus, the original function of the *hotṛ* was to pour libations into the fire.[212] *Hotṛ* also means one who invoked the gods by reciting the hymns and is regarded by some as the earliest priest.[213] In ancient Iran Zaotar was the designation of a class of priests.[214] However, originally *hotṛ* does not seem to have belonged to a distinct priestly class but was identical with *yajamāna*,[215] the sacrificer, and this position he retains in the *pāka yajñas* of the *gṛhya* ritual. Later, with the growth of a more complicated sacrificial ritual, *hotṛ* becomes one of four *ṛtvijs* with three priest assistants or helpers.[216] In some hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, the *hotā* and the *yajamāna* are clearly distinguished[217] and at two places he is one of the seven priests named along with *brahman.*[218]

It is interesting that priestly specialization was manifest not in the monopoly of or greater expertise in worshipping certain deities or in officiating for certain specific clans or peoples but in such matters as the use of specific vessels[219] for offering *soma* to various divinities. This seems to suggest that elaboration of ritual, rather than assimilation of different ethnic groups, resulted in the development of a category of specialists that was to crystallize as the brāhmaṇa varṇa. The earlier terms used for the priests such as *stotṛ, jaritṛ, vipra, kavi, ṛṣi* and *brahman* in the masculine are connected with the function of composing or singing of the hymns or prayers. 'Brāhmaṇa' is of rare occurrence in the *Ṛgveda* and with the exception of the *puruṣasūkta* hymn it does not seem to have been used anywhere else to denote a member of the priestly class.[220] At least in two places it means the cup allotted to the *brahman* priest for drinking *soma.* At several other places it is used as an adjective.[221] Similar is the case of *vipra*, a term which later came to mean exclusively a

member of the brāhmaṇa varṇa but is often used as an adjective[222] in the *Ṛgveda* signifying a state of exhilarated ecstasy or inspired eloquence. Once the term seems to stand for Bṛhaspati[223] and at another place the *vipras* and *adhvaryus* are clearly distinguished.[224] A semantic study[225] of the four key words, *vipra, ṛṣi, purohita* and *brahman* concludes that a professional class of priests evolved gradually in the Ṛgvedic period 'from functional notions of sacerdocy' and only towards the end of this period does it become a closed order known as the brāhmaṇa varṇa.

The beginnings of this process may be seen in those hymns which clearly distinguish between 'singers' (*stotṛ*) and bounteous patrons (*maghavans or sūris*), and thank the gods for bringing 'food' (*anāḍu*)to both.[226] The *vipras* create hymns[227] and are contrasted with the *naras*[228] or *vīras*[229] who go to the battlefield and fight hand to hand[230] while their chief rides a horse or, more likely, a chariot. So the occupational category of composer-chanter-priest is well-marked. In a hymn of the eighth *maṇḍala* the *vipras* claim to be 'kinless' (*abandhavaḥ*)[231] and pray to Indra who has 'numerous kin' (*bandhumantam*) to protect them. This statement seemingly significant may show that priestly functionaries were the first to renounce or transcend kinship ties. Their activities were not confined to a particular clan or tribe and in a verse of the ninth *maṇḍala* the seven priests are described as 'united in consanguineous brotherhood'.[232] Another verse of the tenth *maṇḍala* clearly distinguishes between the *vipra* and the *yajamāna*.[233] Thus in the latest stratum of the *Ṛgveda* the priesthood may be said to have separated into a distinct order claiming the highest position in society by virtue of its control over ritual. It is argued[234] that the term 'brāhmaṇa' was preferred to other terms to indicate the generality of priesthood, for its etymon *brahman* was more comprehensive and covered every type of priestly activity. Its use also emphasized the factor of heredity, so that whereas *brahman* was one of the seven priests, 'brāhmaṇa' was an inherited status.

The transitional character of Ṛgvedic society may be noticed also in the changing pattern of the family. The Ṛgvedic family, as reflected in the earlier stratum of the text, was nuclear or 'elementary' consisting of not more than two generations; and it

was integrated into a wider grouping, the 'clan'. The authors of the *Vedic Index* express the view that the Ṛgvedic evidence does not show whether a son when grown up set up his own house or continued to stay with his father, his wife becoming a member of the father's household; perhaps the custom varied.[235] But allusions to a joint family system occur in the interpolated or latest stratum of the *Ṛgveda* and I may not be wrong in advancing a rather uncommon view: that the joint family emerges only towards the close of the Ṛgvedic phase.

Although Ṛgvedic society was clearly patrilineal, there is scant evidence for the 'patriarchal' authority or control of the father or head of the family. The story of Śunaḥśepa occurs in later Vedic texts. The blinding of Ṛjrāśva by his father mentioned in two hymns,[236] is sometimes cited as proof of a developed *patria potestas*, but, as Macdonell and Keith caution, 'to lay stress on this semi-mythical incident would be unwise'. They point out that there is nothing to show that a father controlled the marriage of his son or daughter. 'Any excessive estimate of the father's powers over a son who was no longer minor and naturally under his control must be qualified by the fact that in his old age the sons might divide their father's property....'[237] In support Macdonell and Keith refer to a verse[238] addressed to Agni: 'Dividing you (*vitvā*), men have served you attentively (*saparyan*) at many places (*purutrā*) just as the goods of an aged father are carried away (*bharanta*).' This verse alludes not merely to the division of an aged father's possessions among his sons, but also indirectly to their separate households.

References to individual couples (*mithunā*, *dampati*) washing and pressing out *soma* juice, offering oblations together and tending the fire in their houses (*dama*) are numerous in the *Ṛgveda*.[239] At one place Agni is called common to all, the protector of the *viś* and of *dampatis*.[240] Another hymn speaks of the equal age (*savayasā*) of a *mithuna* dwelling in the same place and tending the sacrificial fire night and day.[241] Benveniste has shown[242] that the Indo-European roots of early Vedic *dampati* and *viśpati*, **dem* and *vīś, were initially genealogical terms, which later assumed the meaning of physical habitat. Thus *dama* would mean family and *dampati* the master of the house qua family.

This was the smallest social unit, an elementary family.

Another crucial word conveying the sense of 'family', 'house' or 'household' is *gṛha*. In many Ṛgvedic passages it is clearly the material abode or place of residence.[243] The gods are described as going to the *gṛha* of the benefactor.[244] Agni is in every *dama* (house).[245] However, in one place *gṛha*, too, appears to be a consanguineous unit.[246] The usage of *gṛhiṇī* (housewife) and *gṛhastha* (householder) continues to this day in Hindi. The terms *gṛhapati* and *gṛhapatnī* have been translated as head and mistress of the household. Sharma is of the view that the *gṛha* in the *Ṛgveda* was the smallest social unit but was a 'large family containing members of four generations'.[247] Thus *gṛhapati* would be the head of one such family, although elsewhere Sharma suggests that the tribal chief could have been known by the title of *gṛhapati*.[248] Romila Thapar thinks that in the *Ṛgveda gṛhapatis* were of 'higher', that is to say *rājanya*, lineage, 'since the term is brought in when describing the nuptials of the daughter of Sūrya.... Agni is called the *gṛhapati* and the sacred household fire is *gṛhapatya*;'[249] *gṛhapatya* here is obviously an error for the *gārhapatya* fire and not for *gṛhyāgni*. The *gārhapatya* fire was not a sacred 'household fire', but one of the three *śrauta* or public fires, the other two being *āhavanīya* and *dākṣiṇāgni*. It is always differentiated from *gṛhyāgni*, the household fire, also called *vaivāhika* or *smārtāgni*. The latter is meant for offerings, made every morning and evening. It is significant that the Gṛhyasūtras speak of it as the nuptial (*vaivāhika*) fire to be kindled on the day of marriage by the newly married couple, who are to keep it burning constantly. It may be allowed to go out when the wife dies and the man wishes to remain a widower.[250] Thus the distinction between the *gṛhyāgni* and the *gārhapatyāgni* lies not in the fact that one represents 'popular' and the other 'elite' piety, but that the former is the fire of the individual household for the purposes of daily offerings, and the latter a communal fire meant for seasonal or occasional purposes. In the *yātsattras*, which were long sacrificial sessions ritualizing the eastward movement of the Vedic Aryans, the *gārhapatya* fire is to be built on the place where the yoke-pin of the chariot (*śamyā)* comes down.[251] It is contended[252] that the

gṛhya ritual built around the domestic fire was a 'substitute' or 'replacement' of the cumbersome and elaborate *śrauta* ritual, as there is a basic similarity of structure and procedure. Nevertheless, the practice of making daily offerings to the domestic fire may go back to Ṛgvedic times. It was, however, quite distinct from the fire of the *gṛhapati* or *gārhapatyāgni*, which is mentioned in connection with the seasonal *soma* sacrifice in a Ṛgvedic hymn addressed to Ṛtu the personified season.[253]

The clue to the original significance of *gṛhapati* may be found in the collective *sattra* sacrifices performed by a group of men between the age of seventeen and twenty-four in company with their wives, who are given *dīkṣā* along with their husbands. In a *sattra* sacrifice there are no priests, the *yajamānas* or the sacrificers themselves officiate and choose one among them as their *gṛhapati* to perform all the necessary sacred acts in the course of the sacrifice, others merely touching him. Nevertheless, the merit accruing from the sacrifice is supposed to go to all of them equally.[254] A passage of the *Atharvaveda*[255] says that the *sattras* had become *utsanna*, were no longer in vogue. This confirms their archaic character. The rule that a *sattra* is to be performed only by the brāhmaṇas was apparently formulated when the priestly function was confined to the brāhmaṇa varṇa. But the fact that the sacrificial utensils prepared for use in the course of the sacrifice were common to all sacrificers, and also the stipulation in some sūtras that all participants of a *sattra* should belong to the same *gotra,* indicate that originally the *sattras* must have been performed by a group united by kinship. The *gṛhapati* was the leader or chief of one such group. This inference tallies with the description of Agni-*gṛhapati* in the first hymn of the seventh *maṇḍala,* in which well-formed men (*narāḥ sujātaḥ*) and brave heroes (*suvīraḥ*) sit together around a fire in the dwelling. Perhaps the offering of the *gṛhamedha*[256] sacrifice to the Maruts, who are described as *gṛhamedhasa,*[257] the sharers of *gṛhamedha*, is significant, as they are all young and form a collectivity (*gaṇa*) and as such are especially connected with *gṛha.*

Ṛgvedic vocabulary is poor in those terms denoting an extended or joint family system. The wedding hymn found in

the tenth *maṇḍala*, in which it is wished that the bride may preside over a large joint family consisting of father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and other kinsmen, appears to have been recast more than once by priestly hands and it has been pointed out[258] that the language of the later section of the hymn (which contains allusions to the joint family structure), is more akin to modern Sanskrit than to the Vedic. A solitary description of a large household with father, mother, kinsmen *(jñātayaḥ)* and a number of women sleeping in a courtyard is found in a hymn of the seventh *maṇḍala*, but Ghate quotes it as an example of later interpolation.[259] It is also found in the *Atharvaveda*. It is held[260] that kin-based collectives are prominent in the *Ṛgveda*, even if their precise nature is difficult to define. Yet unlike the *Atharvaveda*, the Ṛgveda has very few words expressive of an extended family system. We may suggest that owing to the solidarity of the clan as a social and functional unit it may not have been very necessary to have specific terms distinguishing elders and juniors of different generations and lineages. Hence, Ṛgvedic kinship terminology is classificatory. The term *pitṛ* stands for fathers or ancestors as a whole, and *janitṛ* is added to distinguish one's own father.[261] Similarly, while the terms *sūnu*, *tanaya* and *putra* are used in the *Ṛgveda* to denote all descendants, the *Atharvaveda* uses them in a more restricted sense. The latter text has specific terms for grandfather (*pitāmaha*), grandmother (*mātāmaha*), great-grandfather (*prapitāmaha*) and grandchild (*nāptṛ*),absent in the *Ṛgveda*.[262] Kapadia has shown[263] that whereas in the *Ṛgveda* offerings are made to the collectivity of ancestors known as *pitṛs*, the *Atharvaveda* lays down in a more specific manner that three ascendant ancestors of the ego constitute his *pitṛs* and they are to receive offerings for the manes. A kinship terminology is a means of ordering relationships for social purposes. The Ṛgvedic social structure seems to have been what the sociologists call the Omaha type, in which ancestral lineages of several generations constituted a single united group, the principle of the unity of lineage-generations being 'a method of expressing and emphasizing the unity and the solidarity of the patrilineal lineage group'.[264] In any case, there is nothing to warrant the assertion[265]

that sons were treated as items of property for the labour power they provided for the family, for it is not shown that the family was the basic unit of production and the head of the family had patriarchal authority. References to *pitṛvitta*[266] or 'patrimonial wealth' should not be interpreted in the sense of individual inheritance, but related to the conception of *pitṛ* in the *Ṛgveda* and hence would mean the 'wealth bequeathed by the ancestors'.

The clan, also called 'sib' or 'gens', is the basic social unit among the people who are relatively settled but have not yet developed sufficient agriculture to support a full-fledged political organization.[267] The use of the term 'clan' in the context of Ṛgvedic society has recently been questioned on the ground that the case of exogamy is not proved. The objection is not very serious. In anthropological usage this term has been applied to societies which have gone beyond the 'band' stage but have not developed a unilineal lineage structure.[268] In his definition of the 'clan' Radcliffe-Brown remarks that the term 'should be used only for a group having unilineal descent in which all the members regard one another in some specific sense kinsfolk. . . . Frequently, *but-not-universally*, the recognition of the kinship bond uniting the members of the clan takes the form of a rule of exogamy which forbids marriage between the members of the same clan.'[269] I have avoided the use of the term 'lineage' in the Ṛgvedic context as there is greater sense of genealogy and unilineal descent in that term than in 'clan', though both models trace the descent from a real or mythical ancestor. In the Ṛgvedic vocabulary it is *viś* which seems to approximate to 'clan', and is generally interpreted as such by the Vedic scholars although some would prefer to interpret it simply as 'people' or 'settlement'. But the general trend of evolution being from a social entity to a physical, territorial entity, as demonstrated in the case of *dama*, the *viś* seems to have been a kin unit. In the ancient Iranian its cognate *vīs* denotes 'clan' or a group of several families,[270] and it is quite likely that this was the case with early Vedic too. On the other hand, the term *jana,* which could mean[271] both 'a person' as well as 'community', is also sometimes used in the sense of an exogamous social unit, at least in the later Vedic sources. The *Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra* equates *sagotra* with *samānajana*[272] and

the *janya* or *janyamitra* mentioned in connection with the consecration ceremony is taken to stand for a person allied by marriage.[273] The wife is called *janī* in the *Ṛgveda.*[274]

The case for exogamy among the Indo-Aryans has been argued by a number of scholars[275] including Benveniste,[276] who remarks that the term *ari* has a rather ambivalent meaning in the *Ṛgveda*; it is used in the sense of a 'friend' or 'ally' in one context and 'enemy' or 'stranger' in another. This suggests that *ari* formed a moiety in an exogamous society and hence the relationship was sometimes friendly and sometimes one of rivalry. 'Ārya' was the common reciprocal term used by the members of moieties constituting one community to designate each other and '*Ārya*, which meant the descendant of '*ari*' or '*árya*', came to signify all those tribes which belonged to the same cultural complex, recognized the same ancestors, and worshipped the same gods. Benveniste holds that Aryaman is the god of marriage and hospitality in the *Ṛgveda* and his function is to admit individuals into an exogamous community through marriage. 'Aryaman intervenes when a woman taken from outside the clan is introduced for the first time as a wife into her new family.' In support of his thesis Benveniste cites a verse[277] of the *Ṛgveda* in which Indra's daughter-in-law states that all the *aris* have arrived but her father-in-law Indra is yet to come, meaning thereby that Indra was to her an *ari,* member of an exogamous clan. The meaning of the term *ari/árya* continues to rouse controversy, and although some attribute to it the meaning of 'owner or possessor of wealth', Paul Thieme's interpretation of the term as 'foreigner' or 'stranger' has given rise to a suggestion[278] that the Ārya/Dāsa dichotomy should be seen as that between 'invader' and 'dweller' or 'native'. Whatever the case may be, I have already shown that the contrast between Ārya and Dāsa at least in the initial stages is of an ethnic nature, the latter term acquiring a pejorative connotation due to this conflict. It could have been only with the complete subjugation of the Dāsas that the term acquired the generic significance of 'slave' or servant and may have included such autochthons as the Ibhyas, who are said to receive the reward of their labour once the charioteer is back and settled at home presumably after a hunting expedition.[279]

To conclude, Ṛgvedic society was a simple society in which ranking depended more upon personal qualities and skills, not wealth or status inherited at birth. However, 'what was derived from achievement and experience' came to be based 'on heredity and mythical/ritualistic considerations'[280] by the end of the Ṛgvedic period, a development which receives explicit authentication in the later Vedic sources.

NOTES

1 G.S. Ghurye, *Vedic India* (Mumbai, 1979); R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (henceforth *MCSF*) (Delhi, 1983); Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State* (henceforth *FLS*) (Delhi, 1984). Copious literature exists on the Vedas: see Louis Renou, *Bibliographie Vedique* (Paris, 1931) and R.N. Dandekar, *Vedic Bibliography*, 4 vols. (Pune, 1946, 1961, 1973, 1985).

2 *Priests, Warriors and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions* (Berkeley, 1981).

3 Ghurye, op. cit., p. 1.

4 Ibid., pp. 368-9.

5 Ibid., pp. 173, 323, 324, passim.

6 The only exception is that of Kalibangan (KLB-I), which according to Ghurye shows a 'low scale of urbanization in what was or what was very shortly to be Ṛgvedic Aryandom' (ibid., p. 379). He thinks that KLB-I represents a culture different from KLB-II, which was an extension of the Harappa Culture.

7 Ibid., p. 318. Also see p. 284, passim.

8 Ibid., p. 311.

9 Ibid., p. 260.

10 A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (hereafter *Vedic Index*), 2 vols. (London, 1912; rpt, Delhi, 1982).

11 F.B.J. Kuiper, 'The Ancient Aryan Verbal Contests', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. IV (1960), pp. 217-81.

12 J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (The Hague, 1957); 'Other Folk's Fire' in F. Staal, ed., *Agni: The Ritual of Fire Altar*, Vol. II (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 76-94; 'Householder and Wanderer', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol. XV (1981), pp. 250-71.

13 M. Sparreboom, *Chariot in the Veda* (Leiden, 1985).

14 Ibid., pp. 76, 119-20. Sparreboom draws attention to the frequent equation of *yajña* with *ratha* in the Vedic and, more particularly, Ṛgvedic literature and thinks that the imagery had a historical connection, '. . . for ultimately the chariot and the sacrifice were inseparable, being the instrument for the winning of booty and the conquering of new land', ibid., p. 82. From this point of view Heesterman's analysis of the Vrātya ritual is particularly interesting. He has shown that the Vrātyas were 'authentic Aryans', ethnically connected with the Kuru-Pāñcālas and the original Vrātya ritual was directly connected with their raiding expeditions to capture cattle and barley, activities which were integral to their way of life. The Vrātya-stomas of the Śrautaśūtras substituted systematically in an abstract form the older ceremonies such as 'the cumbersome *mahāvrata* and its *utsanna* rites'. J.C. Heesterman, 'Vrātya and Sacrifice', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. VI (1962-3), pp. 1-37. Also see Ganesh U. Thite, 'Vrātyastoma Sacrifice', *Oriental Journal* (Oriental Research Institute, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati), Vols. XXX-XXXI (1987-8), pp. 63-8. Thite also argues that the Vrātya-stoma ritual was to be performed 'not for discontinuing the life of a Vrātya' but for entering into '*Vrātya*-hood'. He however interprets Vratya life as the earliest form of *sanyāsa*.

15 B.B. Lal, 'Excavation at Hastinapur and Other Explorations in the Upper Ganga and Sutlej Basins, 1950-2', *Ancient India*, Nos. 10 and 11 (1954-5), pp. 5-151.

16 R.S. Sharma, 'The Later Vedic Phase and the Painted Grey Ware Culture', *Purātattva*, No. 8 (1975), pp. 63-7.

17 Ghurye, op. cit., p. 389.

18 *Indian Archaeology—A Review*, 1971, p. 86.

19 Ghurye, op. cit., pp. 310, 311. Also see p. 307 where Ghurye quotes hymns referring to the loss of Viśpalā's leg in a battle and its substitution with an 'iron leg' by the Aśvins enabling her to walk again. Ghurye does not consider the possibility of this story being a mythical invention glorifying the gods' healing powers, but takes it literally. For him the story shows 'the high state of perfection' achieved by the science of surgery in Ṛgvedic times, see infra.

20 Ibid., p. 220; *Ṛgveda*, V.30.15.

21 Ghurye, op. cit., pp. 312-13.

22 S.A. Dange, *Cultural Sources from the Veda* (Mumbai, 1977), p. 42. Sometimes it is argued that German *eisen*, phonetically similar to *ayas*, means iron or any instrument made of iron (ibid., p. 41), but as A.L. Basham points out, Vedic *ayas* is also akin to

Latin *aes*, meaning bronze. In the *Ṛgveda* it certainly denotes either copper or bronze. *The Wonder That Was India* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 38. The terms *kṛṣṇāyasa* or *kārṣṇāyasa*, used in later Vedic literature to indicate iron do not occur in the *Ṛgveda*, as is assumed by Thapar, *FLS*, p. 94.

23 Maurice Bloomfield, *Ṛgveda Repetitions*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 20 (1916), pp. 20-1; also see B.K. Ghosh, Chap. XII, 'Vedic Literature: General View', R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker, eds., *The Vedic Age* (London, 1951), p. 227.

24 Op. cit., pp. 69f.

25 Sukumari Bhattacharji, however, envisages a minimum gap of two hundred years, *Literature in the Vedic Age*, Vol. I (Calcutta, 1984), p. 6.

26 B.K. Ghosh, op. cit., p. 228.

27 For example, *yavaṃ vṛkenāśvinā vapante, Ṛgveda*, I.117.21, is cited by Thapar as an example of plough agriculture (*FLS*, p. 26, fn. 28). For the correct interpretation of the term *vṛka*, see S.A. Dange, op. cit., pp. 7-9, and M.K. Dhavalikar's review of S.A. Dange's *Cultural Sources from the Veda, The Indian Historical Review* (hereafter *IHR*), Vol. IV, No. 1 (1977), p. 115. *Vṛka* also means wolf and is used in this sense at many places.

28 *Ṛgveda*, IV.57. E.W. Hopkins, 'Pragāthikāni', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. XVII (1896), p. 85. Hopkins is of the view that Book IV of the *Ṛgveda* is much later than the other family books and is of the same date as Book VIII, 'Numerical Formulae in the Veda and Their Bearing on Vedic Criticism', *JAOS*, Vol. XVI (1896), pp. 275-81.

29 For example, *lāṅgala* (plough), a proto-Munda loan word in *Ṛgveda*, IV.57.4, and *ulūkhala* (mortar), the Dravidian loan word in *Ṛgveda*, I.28.6.

30 'Genesis of Ṛgvedic Retroflexion: A Historical and Socio-linguistic Investigation' in Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter Edwin Hook, eds., *Aryan and Non-Aryan in India*, Michigan Papers on South and South-East Asia, No. 14 (Ann Arbor, 1979), pp. 235-315. Deshpande points out that references to the killing of the Dasyus are found mostly in Books I and X of the *Ṛgveda*. The influence of non-Aryan elements increases in the post-Vedic period.

31 F.B.J. Kuiper, 'An Austro-Asiatic Myth in the *Ṛgveda*' in *Mededelingan der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* (Afd. Letterkunde N.R. deel 13, no. 7) (Amsterdam, 1950), pp. 163-82.

32 *Ṛgveda*, VIII.66 (77) 6; 10.

33 See my discussion on changes in the meaning of *bhagavat, bhakti* and *bhakta* from early Vedic to post-Vedic times in Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi, 1981), pp. 37-9, 116-18.
34 A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads,* Vol. I, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 31 (Oxford, 1975), p. 252.
35 J.C. Heesterman, op. cit.; J. Gonda, 'Adhvan and Adhvaryu', *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* (hereafter *VIJ*), Vol. 3 (1965), pp. 163-77; also Ganesh Thite, 'Contribution of Western Scholars to the Study of Vedic Ritual', *VIJ*, Vol. 18, pp. 43-57.
36 K.R. Potdar, *Sacrifice in the Ṛgveda* (Mumbai, 1953), p. 3.
37 Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*(London, 1973), pp. 105-12.
38 *Ṛgveda*, X.34.4, refers to the binding and taking away of a gambler as a slave.
39 *Vedic Index*, Vol. II, pp. 278, 387.
40 *Ṛgveda*, VI.47.21.
41 *Ṛgveda*, IV.24.9-10. For the use of *śulka* in a similar context, see *Ṛgveda,* VIII.1.5. The high *śulka* of Varuṇa is mentioned in *Ṛgveda*, VII.82.6.
42 In *Ṛgveda*, X.34.3; *vasnya* qualifies a horse. The gambler laments, 'like a *vasnya* (worthy) horse grown old, I find no use of the gamester'.
43 *Ṛgveda*, III.62.14.
44 *Vedic Index*, Vol. I, p. 109.
45 R.S. Sharma, *MCSF,* p. 31.
46 The term *vaṇij* occurs twice in the *Ṛgveda.* In I.112.11 the Aśvins are requested to give sweet rain for *vaṇij* Dīrghaśravas, the son of Uśij, as they had helped Kakṣivān (another son of Uśij and composer of several hymns) in the past. In V.45.6, again, there is a reference to the *vaṇij* who gained obstructed waters of the heavens. This, according to Sāyaṇa, is a reference to Kakṣivān for whom the Aśvins had sent the rains. Thus in both the passages the term *vaṇij* is applied to the son of Uśij. Potdar (op. cit., p. 146) takes 'Uśij' to be a proper name, but T. Burrow and H.W. Bailey are of the view that the term meant 'Incantator' and 'Uśij' was a type of priest (quoted by Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., p. 61, fn. 70). Lincoln thinks that the chief function of the Uśij priest was to assist warriors on cattle raids. He notes that the term appears thirty times in the *Ṛgveda* and in one-third of these references the uśij is seen helping in the cattle-

raiding activity. Kakṣivān Auśija was a famous seer and a descendant of Pajra (*Ṛgveda*, I.16.1; I.116.7 and elsewhere). There is nothing to show that he was a merchant or trader and the term *vaṇij* may have meant simply 'wanderer'. Madhav M. Deshpande thinks that the Skt *vaṇij* is related to Vedic 'Paṇi', which in his view was the name of a non-Aryan trading tribe (op. cit., p. 306, n. 83). But the *Ṛgveda* has both *vaṇij* and Paṇi without linking the two in any way or showing their connection with trade. See n. 48 below.

47 A.D. Pusalkar, Chap. XIII, 'Aryan Settlements in India' in *The Vedic Age*, p. 249.

48 Paṇi is a derivative of the root *paṇ* which means to bet, to lay a wager, and *paṇa* means gaming, playing for a stake (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *paṇ* and *paṇa*). Hence it is possible that the term initially meant a person who won his riches by gambling and not through trade. Paṇi appears as an adjective of Dasyu in *Ṛgveda*, VII.6.3. Divodāsa, the son of Vadhryaśva, who is described as *ṛṇacyuta*, the cancellor of all debts, is also called the opponent of the Paṇis (*Ṛgveda*, VI.61.1). Debt in the *Ṛgveda* refers mainly to gambling debts and not to any trade loans. P.V. Kane (*History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. III, Pune, 1946, pp. 414-15) and Ghurye (op. cit., p. 246) quote two Ṛgvedic verses which in their view indicate the practice of usury in Ṛgvedic times. *Ṛgveda*, VIII.66.10, says: 'Indra overcomes with his power all the living *bekanāṭas* and Paṇis' (*indro viśvan bekanāṭān ahardṛśa uta kratvā paṇīrabhi*). Yāska explains that *bekanāṭa* means a usurious person identical with the Paṇis (quoted in *Vedic Index*, s.v. *bekanāṭa*). But it is a non-Sanskrit word of uncertain origin and meaning and occurs just once in the *Ṛgveda*. The other verse, *Ṛgveda*, VIII.47.17, speaks of the paying of the one-eighth or one-sixteenth part of the debt. This refers to the obligation to pay back a debt or at least a fraction of it under the norms of tribal reciprocity. Ghurye and Kane see here an allusion to the rate of interest, but see Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, s.v. *ṛṇa*. Similarly, 'Pramaganda', occurring in *Ṛgveda*, III.53.14, means, according to Kane, 'born of a family that is extremely usurious'. But as Macdonell and Keith point out, it is a proper name of the leader of the Kīkaṭas and has nothing to do with usury (*Vedic Index*, Vol. II, s.v. Pramaganda).

49 *Vedic Index*, s.v. Paṇi; Doris Srinivasan regards the myth of Saramā and the Paṇis narrated in *Ṛgveda*, X.108, and hinted at a few other places as a 'mythic intensification of an actual Paṇi', 'Myth of the

Paṇis in the *Ṛgveda*' *JAOS*, Vol. 93 (1973), pp. 44-57.

50 Ghurye, op. cit., pp. 298-301. On the basis of *Ṛgveda*, VII.104.13 and X.71.81, Ghurye argues that the *Ṛgveda* knows even persons who made false claims to being brāhmanas or kṣatriyas, which shows that these were well-established categories. However, the correct interpretation of these verses is given by P.V. Kane (op. cit., Vol. II, Pt I, Poona, 1941, pp. 311-32), who ably refutes Ghurye's contention.

51 R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, p. 159.

52 Ibid., pp. 28f; also see R.S. Sharma, 'From Gopati to Bhupati', *Studies in History*, Vol. II, No. 2 (July-December 1980), pp. 1-11; R. Thapar, *FLS*, pp. 24-5.

53 Anthropologists beginning from Morgan to Sahlins and Godelier have emphasized the dominant and multi-functional role of kinship relations in tribal societies. For an interesting discussion, see Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Foundation of Modern Anthropology Series, 1968); Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 70f.

54 R.N. Nandi, 'Anthropology and the Study of the *Ṛgveda*', *IHR*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1-2 (July 1986 and January 1987), p. 164.

55 F. Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and State* in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III (Moscow, 1970), pp. 273-5.

56 'The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 63 (1961), pp. 322-45.

57 A. Beteille, 'On the Concept of Tribe', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1980), pp. 825-8; M. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society*, quoted in R. Thapar, *FLS*, p. 18, fn. 42. Also see Maurice Godelier, 'The Concept of the Tribe: A Crisis involving merely a Concept or the Empirical Foundations of Anthropology Itself', *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, Pt I, Chap. 3.

58 Elsewhere Thapar writes: 'Vedic society of the earlier half of the first millennium BC can be characterized as a lineage-based society. The unit was the clan, and this formed the essential structure at many levels', 'State Formation in Early India', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1980), p. 656. In *FLS*, the *gaṇa-saṃghas* of the sixth century BC and later are said to have been characterized by the 'lineage system' (p. 78). Such ambiguous use of the term 'lineage' brings under one heading systems whose character and functions differ widely.

59 A.M. Shah, 'Towards A Sociological Understanding of Ancient India', Review of R. Thapar's *FLS, Contributions to Indian Sociology,* New Series, Vol. 22 (1986), pp. 117-33.

60 R. Thapar, *FLS*, p. 10; J. Middleton and D. Tait, *Tribes Without Rulers* (London, 1858; rpt, 1970), pp. 3-4.

61 Emphasis added.

62 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

63 *Marxism and Primitive Societies* (London, 1972).

64 'Class Contradiction in Lineage Societies', *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 4, Nos. 13 and 14 (1979), pp. 41-60; 'The Lineage Mode of Production', *Critique of Anthropology*, No. 3 (Spring 1975), pp. 27-79.

65 Op. cit.

66 'From Reproduction to Production', *Economy and Society*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1972), pp. 93-105.

67 Op. cit., p. 156.

68 Op. cit., p. 120.

69 Kent V. Flannery, 'The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations', *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol. 3 (1972), pp. 399-426, reprinted in *Ancient Cities of the Indus*, ed., Gregory L. Possehl (Delhi, 1979), pp. 27-43.

70 Conical clans are 'kinship units which bind their members with common familial ties but which distribute wealth, social standing and power most unequally among the member of the pseudo-family. Such kin units trace their descent back to an original ancestor, real or fictitious, but at the same time they regularly favour his lineal descendants over the junior or "cadet" lines in regulating access to social, economic or political prerogatives', Eric Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago, 1959), p. 136.

71 Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen*, p. 24.

72 R.S. Sharma, 'From Kin to Class', review of R. Thapar's *FLS* in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 22 (June 1985), p. 961.

73 R.N. Nandi, op. cit., p. 159. However, Nandi's assertion that *rājan* is 'invariably' applied to gods only in the family books is not correct. A verse of the fourth *maṇḍala* (50.8) speaks of people (*viśaḥ*) paying homage of their own free will (*svayamevā namante*) to the *rājan* 'with whom the Brahman hath precedence' (*brahmā rājani pūrva eti*). The following verse as translated by R.T.H. Griffith reads: 'The Gods uphold that King (*rājā*) with their protection who helps the Brahman when he seeks his favour'

(*The Hymns of the Ṛgveda*, Delhi, rpt., 1986, p. 232). It may be argued that since the hymn is addressed to Bṛhaspati, it is of a later date. But Nandi's contention that the earlier family books 'represent egalitarian folkdoms without a chief or king' (p. 155) is confusing. Both Sharma and Thapar convincingly establish that the Ṛgvedic tribes were stateless societies. The tribal chief may not have been anything more than a war leader providing protection to his tribesmen and their cattle and leading cattle raids. The term *satpati* occurring in V.27.1 would confirm this, if I. Kühn's interpretation of it as 'the leader of the raid' is accepted (quoted by Wash Edward Hale, *Asura in Early Vedic Religion*, Delhi, 1986, p. 48). No doubt there is a general absence of centralized political organization in the *Ṛgveda*. For *gopa* and *gopati* as the leader of the tribe, see R.S. Sharma, *Studies in History*, Vol. II, No. 2 (1980), pp. 1-10.

74 *Ṛgveda*, X.42.10. The verse is repeated in the following two hymns. For the various meanings of the term *vṛjana*, see s.v. *vṛjana*, Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, and Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, Vol. II. Also see R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, p. 27.

75 *Ṛgveda*, X.97.6. For *samiti*, see R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (Delhi, 3rd edn., 1991), pp. 105f.

76 *Ṛgveda*, X.78.1, speaks of the good looks of the chiefs (*rājano na citrāḥ susaṃdṛśaḥ*).

77 See, for example, *FLS*, notes on pp. 30 and 31.

78 Ibid., p. 35, fn. 69.

79 The English rendering is from H.H. Wilson's translation of the *Ṛgveda* (Delhi, 1977), p. 401. That the *viś* or the clans choose their *rājan* is mentioned in *Ṛgveda*, X.124.8, regarded as a later addition. For discussion, Hale, op. cit., pp. 88f.

80 'Iranian Arya-and Daha-', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1959), pp. 71-115.

81 *FLS*, p. 43. Also see R. Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History* (Delhi, 1978), p. 111.

82 Bailey, op. cit., pp. 84, 94.

83 E. Benveniste, op. cit., pp. 260-1.

84 M.B. Emaneau has shown that several old Indo-Aryan dialects existed in India even in Ṛgvedic times; classical Sanskrit has descended from a dialect which in some respects was even more archaic than the Ṛgvedic. See 'The Dialects of the Old Indo-Aryan' in H. Birnbaum and J. Puhvel, eds., *Ancient Indo-European Dialects* (Berkeley, 1966), pp. 123-38, quoted by Asko Parpola in

'The Pre-Vedic Background of the Śrauta Ritual' in Fritz Staal, ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of Fire Altar*, Vol. II, p. 43.

85 W.E. Hale, op. cit., pp. 146, 151. Also see S.A. Dange, op. cit., p. 37. Dange asserts that Yadu and Turvaśa are clearly called Dāsas in *Ṛgveda*, X.62.10. But the verse is interpreted generally to mean that Yadu and Turvaśa gave away two Dāsas along with cattle.

86 *Ṛgveda*, VII.6.3.

87 *Ṛgveda*, VII.18.13.

88 *Ṛgveda*, I.130.8; IX.41.1. In the latter verse Soma Pavamāna is said to drive the 'black skin' away and the very next verse speaks of the quelling of the vowless (*avrata*) Dasyus.

89 *Ṛgveda*, II.20.7.

90 Asko Parpola in the article cited in note 84 above. However, his main thesis identifying Harappans as Dravidians and Dāsas as *Asura*-worshippers rests on weak grounds, see infra.

91 Küiper thinks that Śambara is a proto-Munda name (op. cit., p. 177). He is called a Dasyu in *Ṛgveda* IV.31.4 and a Dāsa in IV.30.14 and VI.47.21. Incidentally this shows the virtual identity of the Dāsas and Dasyus. Also see note 97 below.

92 *Ṛgveda*, X.27.10. Indra's claim to have taken away the manliness (*nṛmṇam*) of the Dasyus (X.48.2) may be an oblique reference to this feature of the Dāsa-Dasyus.

93 I.112.10.

94 I.116.15.

95 See also I.117.11; I.118.8; X.39.8.

96 This should not be mistaken as postulating the Aryans as a 'race'. The basic criterion for identifying ethnicity would be a common cultural tradition and a sense of identity. It is held that ethnic identities emerge in the context of intense social interaction with groups characterized by cultural differences. See Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (London, 1969), Introduction.

97 *Ṛgveda*, X.22.8, identifies the Dasyu with Dāsa and calls him *akarman* (without rituals), unthinking (*amantu*), having other vows (*anyavrata*) and inhuman (*amānuṣaḥ*). The Dāsas had their own fortresses, which were broken down by Indra (*Ṛgveda*, I.103.3; II.10.7), and their own *viś* (II.11.4; IV.28.4;VI.25.3; and X.148.2). Some Dāsas were very rich and extolled highly by the poets. Dāsa Balbūtha Tarukṣa made a gift of one hundred (cows?) to the poet of VIII.46.32.

98 *Ṛgveda*, III.12.6; VI.60.6.

99 In *Śūdras in Ancient India* (Delhi, 2nd revd. edn., 1980, pp. 74f),

R.S. Sharma expresses the view that originally Ārya and Dāsa were two separate tribal groups distinguished from each other on the basis of colour, language and religion, but later merged to form one composite whole and some Dāsas even obtained high status. This is plausible, but *Ṛgveda*, VI.22.10, can hardly be regarded as indicative of this process. Sharma quotes Sāyaṇa's interpretation to hold that the verse in question speaks of Indra converting Dāsas into Āryas (ibid., p. 21); but in my opinion the verse simply prays to Indra 'to grant vast unexhausting luck to make the Dāsic, Āryan and Nāhuṣic enemies flee' (*yayā dāsānyāryāṇi vṛtrā karo vajrint sutukā nāhuṣāni*), see Hale, op. cit., p. 166.

100 *Ṛgveda*, VII.86.7; VIII.56.3.

101 VIII.35.16-18.

102 P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt I, p. 25.

103 *Ṛgveda*, I.104.2.

104 Acording to Monier-Williams, varṇa means colour, especially good colour or complexion, lustre, beauty, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. varṇa.

105 *Ṛgveda*, II.12.4. R.N. Nandi's assertion on the basis of this verse that 'Already in the second book Indra is credited with the confining of the subjugated *dāsa* people to a lowly place within the (ārya) varṇa' (op. cit., p. 162) is hardly acceptable, as varṇa here does not stand for Ārya. It is qualified by *dāsam* and hence refers to the Dāsa people. The assumption that varṇa already denoted a system of stratification with the Dāsa occupying a lowly place, is not warranted. The phrase *adharaṃ guhākaḥ* does not mean 'a lowly place in the varṇa system of stratification', but speaks of a 'lowly hiding place' in the physical sense. This act may be compared with Indra's feat of throwing the Dāsa-Dasyu Śambara down from a lofty mountain (*Ṛgveda*, IV.30.14). Again, Nandi's interpretation of *janmanā* and *prajā* as 'servants' and 'slaves' is questionable. The Vedicists generally translate these words in the sense of 'offspring', 'progeny' or 'descendants'. We cannot just assume that the presence of Dasyu girls implied 'multiplication of non-kin labour', unless it is shown that the children of Āryan males from Dāsa-Dasyu females could not be absorbed into the Āryan lineage system. But the stories of Kavaṣa Ailūṣa, Dīrghatamas and Mahīdāsa, son of Itarā, suggest that although some stigma may have been attached to such alliances, mixed parentage did not necessarily give rise to 'non-kin' labour exploited by the Aryan kin groups, at least in Ṛgvedic times. On the other hand, Divodāsa, the famous

king of the Bharatas, may have been an adopted Dāsa (D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Mumbai, 1956, p. 89).

106 See C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of George Dumezil* (Berkeley, 1973).

107 E. Benveniste, op. cit., p. 227.

108 G.S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 210.

109 John Brough, 'The Tripartite Ideology of the Indo-Europeans: An Experiment in Method', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 22 (1959), pp. 69-85.

110 Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., p. 51, fn. 6.

111 Ibid., pp. 135f.

112 W.E. Hale, op. cit.; P.L. Bhargava, 'The Word *asura* in *Ṛgveda*', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 64 (1983), pp. 119-23. According to Bhargava, Indra is called an *asura* or is said to possess 'asuraship' in sixteen hymns of the *Ṛgveda* (p. 120). Also see Hukum Chand Patyal, 'Etymology and Sanskrit Dictionary on Historical Principles', *Indian Linguistics*, Vol. 40 (1979), p. 120.

113 *Ṛgveda*, I.174.1; VIII.90.6; X.96.11; X.99.12. In *Ṛgveda*, III.38.4 it is not clear whether *asura* is used for Indra or Tvastṛ.

114 *Ṛgveda*, IV.16.2; VI.20.2; VI.30.2; VI.36.1; VII.21.7; VII.22.5; X.50.3; X.54.5; X.105.11.

115 I.24.14; II.27.10; II.28.7; VIII.42.1; X.132.4.

116 IV.42.2; V.85.5.

117 V.66.2; VII.36.2; VII.65.1, 2; VII.66.2.

118 II.1.6; II.33.9; V.42.11; VIII.20.17.

119 I.64.2. In VIII.27.20 Viśvedevas are called *asuras*, providing protection to the pious one going to *ṛta* or sacrifice.

120 Lincoln, op. cit., p. 129.

121 *Ṛgveda*, VII.65.2.

122 III.55.1.

123 V.42.11.

124 Hale, op. cit., p. 180. P.L. Bhargava thinks that the original meaning was 'spirited' or 'courageous', op. cit., pp. 119-20.

125 *Ṛgveda*, VII.99.5.

126 X.138.3. He is called a Dāsa in this verse.

127 II.30.4.

128 Varcin is called Dāsa in *Ṛgveda*, VI.47.21, and Pipru, along with

Dāsa Ahiśuva, figures among those who were killed by Indra in *Ṛgveda*, VIII.32.2.

129 A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, pp. 156-7, quoted in P.L. Bhargava, op. cit., p. 123.

130 For example, the *atharvan* priest corresponds to Avestan *athravan* and makes a late appearance in the *Ṛgveda*. He is mentioned in three hymns, two from the ninth and tenth *maṇḍalas* (IX.11.2; X.14.6) and one *dānastuti* inserted in a hymn of the sixth *maṇḍala* (VI.47.24). See Sukumari Bhattacharjee, *Literature in the Vedic Age*, Vol. I, pp. 121-2. Unlike his Avestan counterpart, the Vedic *atharvan* is not connected with fire. Benveniste is of the view that *atharvan* in the Vedas is a late borrowing from Iran, op. cit., p. 228.

Similarly the three orders of old Iranian society were known as *pištra* meaning 'craft'. Etymologically the word meant 'colour'. In Iran the three classes were distinguished by the colour of their clothes—white for priests, red for warriors and blue for farmers/cattle herders. According to Benveniste, the colour classification had a profound symbolism and was related to cosmological concepts which associated a particular activity with a certain colour (op. cit., p. 227). However, the Indian term varṇa has no philological correspondence with the Iranian *pištra* and although it has the primary meaning of colour it was used initially in a physical sense distinguishing two groups of people on the basis of the colour of their skin. Its use to demarcate hierarchical social categories is a later development and is found in the later Vedic texts. The *Mahābhārata* (Critical Edn., XII.181.10-13) ascribes different colours to different *varṇas*—red to the kṣatriya, yellow to the vaiśya and black to the śūdra. This is perhaps additional evidence of the late infiltration of Iranian ideas.

131 Op. cit., pp. 239f.

132 *yajñam ca mānuṣāṇām, Ṛgveda*, I.84.2. Also see VI.1.3; 2.2.5; X.150.2.

133 X.45.6. Soma pressing is said to take place among the *pañcajanas* in IX.65.23.

134 *Nighaṇṭu*, III.18.

135 V.S. Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *ṛtvij*.

136 Padma Misra, *Evolution of the Brahman Class* (in the *Perspective of Vedic Period*), Banaras Hindu University Sanskrit Series, Vol. XIII (1978), p. 141.

137 P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt 2, pp. 1212-13.

138 *Hotṛ* is one who invokes gods and offers oblations. It is derived

from the root *hve*, to call, or *hu*, to pour oblations, ibid., p. 138, fn. 4.

139 *Nirukta*, II.10.

140 J.W. Spellman, 'The Legend of Devāpi', *JRAS* (London, October 1959), pp. 95-9.

141 *Ṛgveda*, III.23.2.

142 VIII.103.2.

143 VI.16.19. For *satpati*, see n. 73 above.

144 *Ṛgveda*, II.7.1; IV.25.4; VII.8.4.

145 VIII.19.32.

146 *Baudhayāna Śrauta-sūtra* list quoted in C.G. Kashikar, ed., *Śrautakośa*, Vol. I, Pt II (Pune, 1962), pp. 1007, 1008.

147 *Ṛgveda*, IV.15.4.

148 VI.27.7.

149 *Vedic Index*, Vol. II, s.v. Śṛñjaya. *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, II.4.4.5, states that Devabhāga Śrotarṣa was the *purohita* of the Kurus and Śṛñjayas.

150 *Ṛgveda*, III.53.24.

151 I.130.10.

152 The legend of Devāpi and Śantanu, however, does not show that the tribal leader 'combined the functions of both priest and warlord', R.S. Sharma, *Studies in History*, Vol. II, No. 2 (1980), p. 2.

153 *Ṛgveda*, II.2.11; V.6.2.

154 VII.1.4.

155 VII.1.15.

156 It is curious that Thapar does not refer to these verses or to the term *sujāta* in support of her thesis of senior and junior lineages in Ṛgvedic times.

157 *Ṛgveda*, X.95.10.

158 I.65.2; II.1.15; II.6.2; V.21.2; VII.8.5; VIII.74.7; X.5.4; X.79.7.

159 III.15.2.

160 I.72.2-5. For the Maruts being described as *sujāta*, also see I.88.3; V.57.5; V.59.6; VIII.20.8. See AV.II.13.5 for the use of this term in the sense of being physically 'well-born'.

161 VI.51.3.

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid., VII.64.1.

164 VI.51.3.

165 X.99.7.

166 V.51.3.

167 V.56.9.

168 V.79.1-10; V.123.3; VII.76.6; VII.77.6. Also see X.172.4.

169 Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., p. 134, passim; Ghurye, op. cit., p. 300. Ghurye refers to *Ṛgveda*, VII.104.13, which mentions the 'kṣatriya who bears false' (*kṣatriyaṃ mithuyā dhārayantam*), and says that if there were persons falsely assuming the title of kṣatriya, it must have been 'almost a caste'. But as Kane points out (op. cit., Vol. II, Pt I, pp. 31-2), the verse speaks of the 'kṣatriya who bears false words', or a kṣatriya 'who has no strength as a kṣatriya should have'. In many later Vedic text 'kṣatriya' is synonymous with *rājā* or 'chief'. There is no implication of varṇa/caste in this Ṛgvedic hymn. As Kane points out, 'unless we project our notions of the later state of society and the caste system when considering this verse, it is hardly possible to hold that this verse . . . refers to persons making a false claim to an entrance into a compact body of kṣatriyas by birth' (ibid., p. 32).

Ṛgveda, VII.104.13, is exactly the same as *Atharvaveda*, VIII.4.13, and according to V.S. Ghate, the occurrence of a Ṛgvedic hymn in the *Atharvaveda* is a strong indication of its later character, *Lectures on the Ṛgveda*, revised and edited by V.S. Sukthankar, Poona Oriental Series 12 (Pune, 1966), p. 69.

170 *Vedic Index*, Vol. I, s.v. kṣatriya; Potdar, op. cit., p. 141; Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt I, p. 30.

171 *Ṛgveda*, VII.64.2; VIII.25.8; X.66.8.

172 See n. 73 above.

173 R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, p. 42.

174 Potdar, op. cit., p. 171.

175 *Ṛgveda*, V.66.2; VII.21.7.

176 *Janānāṃ yo asuro vidhartā*, *Ṛgveda*, VII.56.24. Also see VI.36.1 and VII.21.7, where the distribution of booty is connected with asuraship, Hale, op. cit., p. 60.

177 *Ṛgveda*, III.53.7; III.56.8.

178 Hale, op. cit., pp. 67, 193.

179 For some interesting descriptions of the *vīras/naras*, see *Ṛgveda*, I.73 and VI.75. At two places (X.47.4 and X.104.1) powerful singers are described as *vipravīras*.

180 Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., pp. 125f.

181 *Ṛgveda*, V.59.5; VIII.43.25. Also see X.78.1.

182 S.A. Dange, 'Aspects of War from the *Ṛgveda*', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 44 (1966), pp. 125-38.

183 In the *Pāriplava* legend to be recited during the performance of Aśvamedha, a specific age and sex group was to be honoured

each day. Thus according to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIII.4.3.6-8, on the second day of the *Pāriplava* all elder men (*sthaviras*) assemble, on the third day young handsome boys (*yuvān śobhanāḥ*), and on the fourth day pretty young girls (*yuvatayaḥ śobhanāḥ*) (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, edited by Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya, Vol. III, Dr Ratna Kumari Publication Series No. 3, The Research Institute of Ancient Scientific Studies, New Delhi, 1970).

184 *Ṛgveda*, IX.112.13, Griffith's translation.

185 *Ṛgveda*, I.87.5. Griffith's translation with slight modification.

186 D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 96. For a detailed discussion, idem, 'Origin of the Brahmin Gotras', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 26 (1950), pp. 21-80.

187 According to Kosambi, 'The formation of an internal, Aryan caste system, essentially the separation of the Brahmin in function and discipline from the Kṣatriya and setting of both above the householder Vaiśya, after the *dāsas* had been conquered, must have been accelerated by the assimilation of a subjugated priesthood; for otherwise there is no reason for demarcation into endogamous castes', *JBBRAS*, Vol. 26 (1950), p. 50. Also *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 94-5.

188 Romila Thapar, 'A Response to Professor A.M. Shah', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 2 (1986), p. 292. Also see R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, pp. 73-4.

189 *JBBRAS*, Vol. 22 (1946), p. 35.

190 Agastya is listed as the 'eighth' and was apparently a late entrant among the primary *gotrakāras*. Interestingly, he is connected with the only female warrior mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*, Viśpalā, whose leg was cut off in Khela's battle and restored at Agastya's prayer, see n. 19 above.

191 *JBBRAS* (1950) pp. 43, 50.

192 *Ṛgveda*, VII, 18.6-7.

193 Indra kills Arṇa and Citraratha, both 'Āryas', on the banks of the Sarayū, *Ṛgveda*, IV.30.17. Also see VI.22.10 (n. 99 above); VI.33.3; X.102.3.

194 In the battle of ten kings Bhṛgus along with the Druhyus appear as tribal allies of Turvaśa (*Ṛgveda*, VII.18.6); but in VIII.3.9 and 6.18 they are attributed the priestly function of praising Indra together with the *yatis* (ascetics). *Vedic Index*, s.v. Bhṛgu.

195 *Ṛgveda*, III.53.7; X.62.4; X.67.2.

196 III.53.7.

197 Ibid., verses 11-12.
198 *Ṛgveda*, VII.33.10-13.
199 Kosambi, *JBBRAS*, Vol. 26 (1950), p. 37.
200 Henk W. Bodewitz, 'The Fourth Priest (The Brahman) in Vedic Ritual' in *Selected Studies on Ritual in the Indian Religions* (Essays presented to D.J. Hoens), in Ris Kloppenborg, ed., (Leiden, 1983), pp. 33-68.
201 Supra, pp. 83-5.
202 *Ancient Europe from the Beginnings of Agriculture to Classical Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 4-5, cited in Brendan O'Lary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 278-9.
203 Ibid.
204 John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, Vol. I (London, 1931), pp. 52f.
205 R.E.M. Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization*, (Cambridge, 3rd edn., 1968), pp. 108-10.
206 E. Mackay, *Further Excavations, at Mohenjodaro* (Delhi, 1938),Vol. II, pls LXXXVII, pp. 222, 235.
207 Ghurye, op. cit., p. 157.
208 Herbert P. Sullivan, 'A Re-examination of the Religion of the Indus Civilization', *History of Religions*, Vol. IV (1964-5), pp. 115-25. Also see A.L. Basham, *The Origin and Development of Classical Hinduism* (Delhi, 1990), p. 4.
209 Professor B.P. Mazumdar was of the view that the history of technology indicates a break from Harappa to historic times. He cited *Ancient India*, No. 8 (1952, pp. 51-2) to point out that faience beads made in Harappan times reappeared after a long gap around the first century AD at Taxila and still later at Charsada and Ahicchatra, 'Continuity and Change in Ancient and Early Medieval India (*c.* 2300 BC-1200 AD)', typescript. Also see Suvira Jaiswal, 'Caste in the Socio-Economic Framework of Early India', Presidential Address to the Ancient India Section, published in the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Bhubaneswar Session, 1977).
210 Supra, n. 134.
211 *ṛtvijyajñakṛducyate*, cited in V.S. Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *ṛtvij*; also see *Ṛgveda*, I.1.1.
212 Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., p. 62.
213 Potdar, op. cit., p. 161; Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads*, p. 254.
214 He is now known as Zot or Zoti, the chief priest whose sacred duty is to recite the invocation from the *gāthā* during a ritual ceremony.

215 Henk W. Bodevitz, op. cit., p. 35.

216 Interestingly in ancient Iran the Rathwi or Rathwiskere was an auxiliary priest who assisted Zoatar, the chief priest, and did the manual work at the sacrifice, Gajanana M. Patil, 'Priesthood in *Avesta* and *Ṛgveda*', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Vol. 18, Tarporewala Memorial Volume (1957), pp. 221-5.

217 For example, III.29.8.

218 The seven are *hotṛ, potṛ, neṣṭṛ, agnidh, praśastṛ, adhvaryu* and *brahman, Ṛgveda*, II.1.2; X.91.10.

219 Thus *hotra, potra, neṣṭra* and *brāhmaṇa* were cups allotted to priests designated correspondingly.

220 Padma Misra, op. cit., p. 198. Infra, pp. 192-3.

221 Ibid., p. 159.

222 In *Ṛgveda*, VI.45.2 and VIII.61.9 the term *avipra* occurs in the sense of dull, uninspired.

223 X.67.2; W.E. Hale, op. cit., p. 72.

224 *Ṛgveda*, III.7.7.

225 Padma Misra, op. cit.

226 *Ṛgveda*, VII.7.7. It is repeated in VIII.7.7 for *sūris* and *stotṛs*; see also II.2.12.

227 VII.22.9.

228 I.8.6.

229 VI.7.3.

230 I.8.2. Indra is described as assisting them from his car (*arvatā*), Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda*, p. 5.

231 *Ṛgveda*, VIII.21.4.

232 *samīcīnāsa āsate hotāraḥ saptajāmayaḥ*, IX.10.7.

233 X.40.14.

234 Padma Misra, op. cit., p. 200.

235 *Vedic Index*, Vol. I, pp. 526-8, s.v. *pitṛ*.

236 *Ṛgveda*, I.116.16; I.117.17.

237 *Vedic Index*, op. cit.

238 *Vedic Index* gives *Ṛgveda*, I.70.10. This is, however, a misprint for I.70.5. This error recurs in a number of publications—without acknowledgement to Macdonell and Keith!

239 *Ṛgveda*, I.83.3; 131.3; II.39.2; III.53.4; V.3.2; VIII.31.5-6. *Mithuna* is often used to denote 'couple' in the *Ṛgveda*. S.A. Dange, *Sexual Symbolism from Vedic Ritual* (Delhi, 1979), pp. 51-2.

240 I.127.8.

241 I.144.4.

242 Benveniste, op. cit., pp. 251-4.

243 *Ṛgveda*, I.49.1; I.110.2; I.124.11; I.135.7; III.60.5; IV.49.6; VII.59.10. Also see I.28.5; VII.89.1; X.40.3.
244 V.11.4; also see I.71.4; I.124.11.
245 V.1.5; V.6.8.
246 *ayaṃ nābhā vadati valgu vo gṛhe*, 'he speaks here nicely in consanguinity in your house', X.62.4.
247 *MCSF*, p. 48.
248 Ibid., p. 51.
249 *FLS*, pp. 36-7. In this work references are often mixed up and incorrect. In this particular case, p. 37, n. 76 cites references for the *gṛhapatya* [*sic*] fire as *Ṛgveda*, I.12.6; I.36.5; I.60.4; and VI.48.8. These verses describe Agni as *gṛhapati*, but make no mention of the *gārhapatya* fire. On the other hand, page 36 has n. 75 quoting *Ṛgveda*, X.85, for the occurrence of *gṛhapati*. Again, the word *gṛhapati* does not occur at all in this hymn. It has *gṛhapatnī* once (verse 26) and *gārhapatya* twice (verses 27 and 36). The latter term is generally interpreted here in the sense of 'control over the household'. But see infra pp. 209-10.
250 P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt 1, pp. 678-9.
251 Sparreboom, op. cit., pp. 80-1.
252 Brian K. Smith, 'The Unity of Ritual: The Place of Domestic Sacrifice in Vedic Ritualism', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 29 (1986), pp. 80-1.
253 *Ṛgveda*, I.15.12.
254 P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt 2, p. 1241.
255 *Atharvaveda*, XI.7.7-8, quoted by N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Ancient Indian Rituals and Their Social Contents* (Delhi, 1975), p. 64.
256 *Ṛgveda*, VII.56.14.
257 VII.59.10.
258 Shakuntala Rao Shastri, *Women in the Vedic Age* (Mumbai, 1969), pp.13-18.
259 V.S. Ghate, op. cit., p. 69.
260 R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, pp. 48-9.
261 Irawati Karve, 'Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usages in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda*', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. XX (1938-9).
262 *Vedic Index*, Vol. I, p. 525. The *Ṛgveda* has no separate word for 'uncle'. *Abhrātṛvya*, the negative form of *bhrātṛvya*, is found in *Ṛgveda*, VIII.21.13, in the sense of 'one having no rival' and is applied to Indra. The verse is repeated in *Atharvaveda*, XX.114.1; and is certainly of late origin.

263 *Hindu Kinship* (Mumbai, 1947), pp. 7-45, 222, 307-9; Suvira Jaiswal, *IHR*, Vol. VI, Nos. 1-2, p. 55.

264 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, eds., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London, 10th impression, 1970), pp. 33-5.

265 R.S. Sharma, *MCSF*, p. 29.

266 *Ṛgveda*, I.73.1, 9.

267 Eleanor B. Leacock in Introduction to F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London, 1972, rpt., 1977), Pt II, p. ii. For the connection between the joint family and ownership or control of land, see Suvira Jaiswal, *IHR*, Vol. VI, Nos. 102, p. 60.

268 Sahlins, op. cit., p. 49. Sahlins also speaks of the 'conical clan', which in his view were neither endogamous nor exogamous. For Polynesian clans without a unilineal lineage structure, see M. Godelier, op. cit., p. 89.

269 Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, op. cit., p. 40; italics mine.

270 Benveniste, op. cit., pp. 239f.

271 Stefan Zimmer, 'On A Special Meaning of *Jana* in the *Ṛgveda*' *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. XXIX (1986), pp. 109-15.

272 Quoted in P.V. Kane, op. cit., Vol. II, Pt I, p. 480.

273 J. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, pp. 118-19, fn. 24.

274 *Ṛgveda*, I.71.1; I.112.15; VII.18.2; X.10.3.

275 J. Brough, 'The Early History of the Gotras', *JRAS* (1946), pp. 32-45; (1947), pp. 76-99; A.C. Banerjee, *Studies in the Brāhmaṇas* (Delhi, 1963).

276 E. Benveniste, op. cit., p. 303.

277 *Ṛgveda*, X.28.1.

278 Bruce Lincoln, op. cit., p. 135, fn. 5.

279 *Ṛgveda*, X.114.10. They are also mentioned in I.65.4. The Ibhya, often translated mistakenly as noblemen or rich persons, was an aboriginal tribe with the elephant totem, perhaps equivalent of Mātaṅga, modern Mang, see D.D. Kosambi, 'Combined Methods in Indology', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. VI (1963), pp. 181-4.

280 R.S. Sharma, 'Kin Conflicts and Rise of Hierarchy in Later Vedic Times', *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd edn., Chap. XIII.

APPENDIX

Mystifying the Aryans[1]

A substantial portion of the foregoing chapter had appeared in *The Indian Historical Review* (Vol. XVI, Nos. 1-2, July 1989–January 1990, pp. 1-34). A response from Professor Romila Thapar was published in *IHR*, Vol. XVIII (Nos. 1-2, July 1991–January 1992, pp. 178-99) under the caption 'The Aryans Ride Again'. As the debate is basically on the applicability of the concepts of 'lineage society' and 'lineage mode of production' to society reflected in the Ṛgvedic data, I am giving below the text of my rejoinder (published in *IHR*, Vol. XX, Nos. 1-2, July 1993–January 1994, pp. 219-28), which raises a number of additional points and will help in clarifying these concepts and my objections further.

In her 'response' Professor Thapar writes that the *Ṛgveda* is not central to her thesis, which seeks to contrast lineage society with state system, and hence it has been necessary for her to move back and forth among the literary sources without worrying about 'accepted chronology'; for her main concern is to use 'concepts from theories emerging from other disciplines'. Without minimizing the value of an interdisciplinary understanding I would like to assert that the boundaries of time and space are crucial to the discipline of history and any methodology of historical reconstruction—no matter how innovative—if premised on the anachronistic use of historical evidence, would have only doubtful validity.[1] Moreover, a paradigmatic change would be justified if it provides better insight or greater precision. But, as I have argued earlier, Thapar uses 'lineage' sometimes for 'clan' and sometimes for *vaṃśa*[2] This can hardly be regarded as less confusing than the concept of 'tribe', which continues to find favour with many historians and sociologists. Overemphasis on the lineage principle leads to the glossing over of the distinction between societies that are well-advanced towards a class system

and political organisation and those which are still largely egalitarian, subsisting on hunting,[3] gathering, pastoral and horticultural activities.

The term 'tribe' derives from the Latin *'tribus'* or Umbrian *'trifu'*, which, as Godelier points out, were terms denoting Indo-European institutions of great antiquity. According to him the concept of tribe 'in the language and thought of Indo-Europeans, was a fact of their experience, and an observable one'.[4] Thapar is right in holding that anthropological concepts are invented for analytical purposes and need not necessarily be derived from any term or 'description which the society might give of itself'. She cites the example of 'feudalism' in this connection. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that unlike the concept of 'feudalism', which is an abstraction to denote a specific mode of production, the 'lineage' is a much more concrete and real phenomenon. In later Vedic times[5] when tribes were clearly segmented into ranked lineages, the term *gotra* came to signify 'lineage' or even a broader kin-unit tracing its descent from a real or fictive progenitor, but it is not without significance that in the *Ṛgveda gotra* still means 'cow-pen' and not 'lineage'.[6]

On the concept of lineage mode of production Thapar writes that my understanding is based on 'inadequate reading' and I have only quoted from Emmanuel Terray's earlier work *Marxism and 'Primitive' Societies*, but in her generalizations she 'was drawing more on Rey than on others'.[7] Hence, it is necessary to quote in some detail what Pierre-Philippe Rey says in 'Class Contradiction in Lineage Societies'. In response to Meillassoux's following criticism: (quoted by Rey) 'In contrast to Rey's suggestions classes are not created by the two categories that he proposes: the group of *all* the elders and the group of *all* the young men in the same community,' Rey replies: 'the juniors are clearly not the only people who are exploited by the elders. *If by juniors we are to understand adolescent or adult males*[8]—women and children (and where they exist, slaves) are exploited at least as severely. It is for this reason that the group which has to be defined as a dominated class is the entire local group excluding only the elder.'[9]

It is obvious that the debate is over the exploitation of the

junior 'adolescent', 'adult males' of the same lineage by the elders and not over the exploitation of junior lineages of a stratified segmentary society. In fact Rey accuses Meillassoux himself of 'having concentrated too exclusively on the opposition elders: juniors', and writes that in a patrilineal or patrilocal society there is a possibility of dependent cadets' succeeding to the position of elders. He, however, adds:

> In the case of a patrilineal and patrilocal society the juniors who are going to inherit the ancestral land of the lineage live and produce on the lineage land, but the other producers, women and slaves are in no circumstances able to inherit this land. I was thus able to conclude that this allows us to dismiss the banal objection that is usually made to the existence of classes in lineage society: 'How can there be classes when everyone will ultimately become a leader?' Such an objection is clearly unjustified since (1) slaves, (2) nearly all women, and (3) whatever is said, most men will never become leaders.[10]

Rey holds that in a lineage society 'the division of labour rests primarily on the sexual division of labour and the division relating to social age',[11] which in turn is 'determined by the age of marriage'.[12] These divisions of labour in lineage society are determined by the 'system of appropriation'. Rey argues that 'since the age division, while keeping some jobs exclusively for women and for children is also the basis for their exploitation, we can conclude that there is formal subordination of the group of producers as a whole to the exploitation of the lineage'[13] and in his view 'the marriage system is the central means by which the dominant class exercises its power over the dominated'.[14] Thus, in Tangui Pannu and Kuni societies

> the dependence of juniors on the elders (within the patrilocal, and not the matrilineal group) for the acquisition of bridewealth is one of the crucial arguments which leads them to provide the elder with permanent gifts of labour and of kind (called Pawu). At the beginning of the colonial period this Pawu was obtained through silver which was earned by the juniors who sold their produce or their labour power, and bridewealth continued to be given to the father.

With regard to the Gagam society of northern Togo, Rey writes,

> the sexual division of labour imposes on the juniors the necessity of staying in the eldest brother's unit of production, for as long as they remain unmarried. Moreover the *social* division of labour regards all non-married men as 'juniors' and it is these young men who have to undertake all the hardest tasks (digging furrows for example) while the elders perform jobs which have important symbolic value (broadcasting the 'fonio') but which require much less work,[15]

and he concludes that 'in this case there is exploitation of juniors by the elders'.

I have quoted Rey's article at length to clarify the meaning of 'juniors' and 'elders' or 'seniors' in the debate. However, what I seriously contest is the analytical validity of a model which blurs the qualitative distinction between exploitation of biologically determined age and sex groups by the elders of the same lineage and the exploitation of junior lineages based on fictive or real genealogical connections by senior lineages of a stratified society where kinship is little more than a metaphor for class.[16] In fact by stretching the concept of lineage society to cover class exploitation Thapar has to abandon the very criterion of the lineage principle while excluding the śūdras from lineage society. In her view śūdras and Dāsas were 'outside the lineage system'[17] not because the internal structure of these communities could not have had lineage elements but because they were outside what is conceived as the mainstream 'lineage society' of senior and junior lineages and were exploited by the latter who 'denied' them 'a lineage form'.[18]

Coming to the specifics, Thapar charges me of being 'categorical' regarding the chronology of the *Ṛgveda* and ignoring the caveat of B.K. Ghosh about its uncertainties. On the contrary, I had quoted Bloomfield, who wrote much before Ghosh, to point out that older and newer hymns are to be found in each *maṇḍala*. Following this logic I had also shown how the *Puruṣa-sūkta* hymn of the tenth *maṇḍala* refashions an old Indo-European myth to justify the fourfold stratification which comes about towards the close of the Ṛgvedic period. Thapar too has to concede (p. 194) that 'a major part of the *Ṛgveda* does not articulate this stratification' and that there is 'general agreement'

that the tenth *maṇḍala* and a part if not all of the first 'appear to be later than the rest, however small the time-gap' (p. 179).

Thapar suggests that in the editing of the hymns the chronology might have been upset and the tenth *maṇḍala* 'can be used to reflect on perspectives relating to both the earlier and later society'. However, the addition of the Vālakhilya hymns at the end of the eighth *maṇḍala* in the form of a supplement suggests that there have been at least three stages in the editing and compilation of the *Saṃhitā*, the closing with the eighth *maṇḍala* representing an intermediate stage. Hence the time-gap does not appear to be as small as visualized by Thapar. J. Gonda[19] wrote 'there is much to be said for the supposition that a good deal of the contents of the *Ṛgveda* is separated from the remaining Vedic literature by a comparatively wide chronological distance....' We should distinguish between the time of the composition of hymns and that of their ultimate codification and try to identify the new elements, the manner and purpose of their induction and also see diachronically what preceded and followed such induction. That such an exercise need not be meaningless or futile may be seen with reference to my remarks on the remodelling of the *Puruṣa-sūkta* and the Apālā hymn.

A study[20] of the occurrence of the term 'brāhmaṇa' in the Ṛgvedic *maṇḍalas* would both confirm and illustrate the chronological perspective I have adopted. The term, derived from *brahman* (in the masculine), indicates the crystallization of priestly groups in one generic stratum, and is not found in the third, fourth, fifth and ninth *maṇḍalas.* A solitary occurrence[21] (in its declensional form *brāhmaṇāt*) in the second *maṇḍala* refers to the cup in which *soma* is offered by the *brahman* priest (one of the seven ritual specialists who gradually emerge as the ritual of sacrifice becomes more and more elaborate).[22] In the sixth *maṇḍala* the term is used only once and that too as an adjective of 'fathers' (*pitaraḥ*)[23] and not 'as a functioning category among priests' as is assumed by Thapar. The only place in the family books where 'brāhmaṇa' denoted the priestly class and is mentioned in the plural is the well-known frog hymn,[24] which 'evidently belongs to a late period of Vedic poetry'.[25] However, six hymns of the tenth and one of the first *maṇḍala* clearly refer

to brāhmaṇas.[26] This class appeared towards the end of the Ṛgvedic period merging the ritual specialists into one kin-group as the process of social differentiation deepened. The process also led to the eventual emergence of a kin-based *rājanya* nobility, distancing itself from the *viś* commoner as is reflected in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* hymn. The chronology of this development is based on the generally accepted chronology of the Ṛgvedic *maṇḍala*s and does not conflict with the view of Thapar, who in any case speaks of both the brāhmaṇa and the śūdra as 'addenda' to the 'initial structure of the varṇa system'[27] consisting of the kṣatriya and *viś* lineages, which in her view formed the core of the mainstream Vedic society.

Nevertheless, Thapar's dismissal of my argument, that the mention of the Bharatas and the Kurus as synonyms of *ṛtvij* in the *Nighaṇṭu* suggests that in earlier times any member of these tribes could function as a *ṛtvij*—which term has Indo-European roots but later becomes the designation of the officiating priest at grand sacrifices—on the ground that it is based on a late text is hardly justified. My inference is drawn by reading against the grain of the later Vedic texts, where such pieces of evidence can be explained only in terms of survival of earlier practices. In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* Divodāsa, the son of Vadhryaśva, is said to have expressed the desire 'May I obtain both: priesthood and nobility, may I who am king become a seer (*rājā sanna ṛṣiḥ syām iti*).'[28] We are told that he saw or composed the *ārṣabha sāman*. Thus not merely the performance of the rite of sacrifice but the priestly function of composition of a chant is attributed to Divodāsa, the chief of the Bharatas. *ṚV*, VI.61.1 clearly speaks of him as the son of Vadhryaśva, who also has a son in Sumitra. Sumitra and his descendants are described as keeping the fire of Vadhryaśva kindled and are called Vādhryaśva, i.e. belonging to the lineage of Vadhryaśva.[29] Thus the case of Devāpi and Śantanu is not an isolated instance and has its parallels in Devaśravas-Devavāta and Sumitra-Divodāsa. As to the 'gradual emergence of a body of priests' among the Vedic people, I could not agree more. This is precisely what I have tried to show and I connect it to greater availability of surplus, growing inequality and the movement towards state formation, in which the ritual

specialists played an important ideological role. It was however the internal dynamics of a society in transition rather than the 'addenda' of intrusive elements which were crucial for the process.

The view of Thapar on this issue is quite ambiguous. In her 'Response' she writes: 'My contention is not that the brāhmaṇa and *dāsa* continued from Harappan times ...' but suggests, 'some elements of an earlier system may have persisted but were given form and body in a different context with the eventual emergence of the four varṇas: that there might have been two dichotomies which cohered to form the four varṇas—the brāhmaṇa-*dāsa*/śūdra and the kṣatriya-*viś*' (pp. 193-4). The problematic of 'when' and 'what' elements is left rather vague. If it is not the brāhmaṇa and the Dāsa (peoples?) who continue but the conceptual *dichotomy* of the brāhmaṇa-Dāsa/śūdra, what was the distinguishing feature of this dichotomy?[30] It could not be wealth or power, for the brāhmaṇas could not have been denied these and Thapar speaks of wealthy Dāsa/śūdra chiefs. Was it then the notion of ritual impurity of the Dāsa/śūdra social groups? Elsewhere she has been more specific and suggested that the essentials of the caste system, endogamy, the idea of ritual impurity of social groups, etc., might have been present in the Harappa culture.[31] I have already critiqued these views in detail[32] and need not repeat my arguments here. In any case these may be regarded as part of the 'hackneyed items' listed several decades earlier. Thapar recommends that we should 'investigate what might have been close relationships between Harappan religious practices and their induction at some point into Vedic ritual . . . and the possible continuity, but not altogether unchanged, of some ritual activities from Harappan times to that of the *Ṛgveda*', (p. 194) and to substantiate this she refers to an article on the Agnicayana rite by Converse[33] where it is argued that the altar constructed of baked bricks as well as the use of *ukhā* and *mahāvīra* pots in this rite represent the pre-Vedic, presumably Harappan' elements. Here again evidence derived from the *Yajurveda* is being foisted on the *Ṛgveda*. Staal shows that whereas the Agnicayana ritual is the most celebrated of the rituals in the *Yajurveda* 'it is not mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* at all'.

According to him 'the gap between the *Ṛgveda* and the *Yajurveda* is wide. The former is largely Indo-Iranian, the latter only to a small extent. . . . The altar of the Agnicayana is not only absent from the *Ṛgveda,* but it is very different from anything we meet with there.'[34]

The point is, I have nowhere denied the possibility of the survival of Harappan elements and the fusion of the Aryan and the non-Aryan, and have cited Kuiper's views on the Austro-Asiatic origin of the Boar Myth[35] and the non-Aryan names of certain priestly families attributed with the authorship of the hymns of the eighth and some of the tenth *maṇḍala.* But for me 'when', 'what', 'how' and 'why' are important questions which deserve consideration. I do not see either the 'essentials of the caste system' or the 'brāhmaṇa-Dāsa/śūdra dichotomy' as continuing elements of a pre-Ṛgvedic culture. Referring to Bruce Lincoln's study of the Nilotic tribes of East Africa and John Brough's thesis on the prevalence of a threefold division among the Semitic pastoral communities of the Old Testament, I have argued that the separation of the *brahma* and the *kṣatra* elements—the ritual-specialists and the warriors—is rooted in the material-ideological requirements of the pastoral tribes, which tend to develop two kinds of specialists, one claiming to increase the cattle-wealth of the tribe through offering sacrifices to gods, and the other through cattle-raids. Initially these groups are not differentiated on the basis of their lineage connections and I have cited the view of Benveniste to show that although the threefold functional grouping of priests, warriors and commoners could be traced to the Indo-European stage, social structure was organiszed on a different type of classification, that of family, clan and tribe in the manner of concentric circles. Thus, the division of *brahma* and *kṣatra* belonged to the realm of function and not lineage and these were still open categories not exclusive to certain lineages.

I consider it very significant that later when the lineage principle does begin to ensure superior rank and privilege the term *rājanya* meaning kinsmen of the *rājā* is used to denote this class rather than the term *kṣatriya.* In characterizing Ṛgvedic society we must bear in mind the main body of the text and not

get carried away by one or two isolated passages which may be seen clearly as late or intrusive elements. I have called the society 'simple' as opposed to a 'complex' hiearchically stratified one since, despite evidence of a gradual growth of inequality among the tribesmen, ranks were still open based on personal achievements and had not stabilized as genealogically closed categories, which development is clearly seen in later Vedic times. Differentiations in Ṛgvedic society are to be seen in this light. This is not a static view: I have referred to its transitional character and the changing pattern of the family. There are references to polygamy particularly of the chiefs in later books. As R.S. Sharma has shown,[36] unequal distribution of cattle-wealth captured in frequent cattle-raids had begun to erode the egalitarian ethos of Ṛgvedic tribes as seen in the *dānastutis* which constitute the latest stratum of the text. This development would also influence the pattern of family and kinship, leading to the emergence of the patriarchal joint family. As to my interpretation of the terms *gṛha* and *gṛhapati*, I have discussed the issue in detail elsewhere[37] and constraints of space would not allow me to repeat them here.

Nevertheless, mention of the division of an aged father's possessions among his sons (*ṚV*, I.70.5) has to be interpreted with reference to the nature of property and the extent of its privatization. A father may distribute his personal possessions among his sons even in an egalitarian band or a hunting and gathering society. The verse in question speaks of the distribution of sacred fire at many places, presumably households and I have suggested that this may reflect not a patriarchal joint family system which is getting split in the aged father's lifetime but the establishment of separate households by adult sons, a picture consistent with the embedding of the nuclear families in the clan structure, through which the network of production and distribution of goods operated. Admittedly this is only a suggestion. However, one need not make much of *ṚV*, III.31.2, which according to the authors of the *Vedic Index* refers 'to the legitimate son who does not leave the heritage of his father's share to his sibling'. The two verses in question, 1 and 2 of this hymn are obscure and unrelated to the subsequent verses.

Macdonell and Keith have depended on the comments of Yāska, who sees in them a reference to the institution of *putrikā-putra*, the appointment of the daughter to beget a son for continuing the lineage of her father, and the denial of the right to inheritance to female relatives; but most scholars regard the explanations given by Yāska and Sāyaṇa as arbitrary, and in the opinion of Hanns-Peter Schmidt 'No really plausible interpretation has been offered so far.'[38] Verse 2 gives *mātaro* in the dual to denote both parents, suggestive of a very different gender equation and perhaps proof of the very ancient origin of the two verses. According to one view[39] they refer to a transition from matriarchate to patriarchate, and the first is suggestive of incest[40] rather than of the later patriarchal custom of appointing a brotherless daughter as *putrikā*. It has been pointed out[41] that *naptṛ* or *napāt* usually means 'son' in the *Ṛgveda*, hence *nāptyam* here may refer to the 'son' and not 'grandson'. At any rate, there is no justification for perpetuating the error of mistranslating *ṚV*, I.65.4,[42] committed by most scholars including Geldner, who took the term *ibhya* to mean 'a rich person' or 'vassal' and interpreted the verse to mean that the fire consumes the forest as a king consumes the rich. This leads Thapar to conclude 'that the consumption of wealth on ritual occasions was a statement of status and political power'.[43] In 1963 D.D. Kosambi[44] had traced the history of the word in Vedic and Pali texts and the inscriptions of Aśoka and shown that *ibhya* refers to an aboriginal tribe with an elephant totem. The 'Aryan king' of the *Ṛgveda* no doubt 'would eat up tribal savages mercilessly', he remarked.

Finally, the passages quoted from Bailey's article[45] by Thapar only confirm my point that Bailey attributes the meaning of 'owner' or 'possessor' of wealth to *árya* and not to *ārya*. He is clear on this issue and writes 'It would be unexpected if the primary stage *árya* from which *ārya* was derived by *vṛddhi* were unknown in the sense of 'noble'. Some cases of *aryá* = 'noble' can be cited but they cannot easily be distinguished from *aryá* = 'possessor' (pp. 103-4). About the elongated form *ārya* he writes commenting on *ṚV*, I.59.2:

Clearly the *árya* are the party of the poets, and certainly it is a laudatory

> epithet. The *dāsa-* is hardly a proper name in the Indian texts. It would equally suit to take *ārya* here as an epithet meaning 'noble' as at a secondary stage from *arya*—that is, rather 'connected with nobles'. . . . The ethical value then appears clearly in the later tradition of the *Āryāvarta* of the *brāhmaṇas*. . . .
>
> As a laudatory word without ethnic value *ārya*—is frequent in later texts Buddhist and Jaina. . . . An early meaning 'connected with nobles' has thus derived to an ethnic name and to a non-ethnic use. . . .[46]

It would be clear that Bailey is connecting *ārya* with what he calls the secondary meaning of the term *ārya*, that is 'noble' in an ethical sense and not with its primary meaning of 'possessor'. The arguments of Bailey have been critiqued by Gherardo Gnoli, who writes emphatically, 'The earliest documented uses of *arya*—always have an ethnic significance . . . the attempt to give a meaning other than ethnic one to OP (= Old Persian) *arya*—are based on uncertain, dubious, etymological reconstructions and must necessarily be rejected.'[47] The evidence in his view is 'unequivocal'. Expressing agreement with Benveniste he writes that the Iranian *arya* 'serves only to designate those who belong to single ethnic groups'.

The use of the term 'Ārya' to denote a branch of Indo-Europeans in the ethnic sense is further confirmed by the fact that when the Aryans were defeated and enslaved by the people of Finland, the Finnish term '*orja*' which is derived from '*ārya*' came to mean slave in the Finnish language.[48] The process leading to this change in the meaning of the term *ārya/orja* has a parallel in the semantic change occurring in the meaning of '*dāsa*', which from the designation of an ethnic group came to mean 'slave' towards the close of the Ṛgvedic period. Otherwise the transition from denoting 'a person of high status' or 'possessor' to 'slave' would be inexplicable. At one place in the *Ṛgveda* Indra clearly says 'I did not turn the Aryan name over to Dasyu' (*na yo rara āryaṃ nāma dasyave*).[49] Thapar says the quotation from Pāṇini in her book was a 'typographical error'. If so, what is the relevance of the passage for interpreting *ārya* as *svāmī*, the possessor, or 'vaiśya'? The error is repeated in two different ways in two different publications.[50]

With regard to the antiquity of the *sattra* sacrifice, Thapar has ignored the evidence of the *Atharvaveda*, where already it is described as a sacrifice which has fallen in disuse (*utsanna*).[51] Nor does she take into account the views[52] of Heesterman and Sparreboom who have shown that the *yātsattras* were in fact ritualizations of the nomadic activities of the Aryans. The archaic nature of a *sattra* involving fertility rites is indicated by *ṚV*, VII.33.13, which tells us that Māna (Agastya) and Vasiṣṭha were born from the pitcher into which Mitra and Varuna had dropped their semen in the course of a *sattra* sacrifice.[53]

As to the reconstruction of archaeological cultures 'to investigate the contours of Ṛgvedic society', how does this go against my perception of Ṛgvedic society? As Professor Shereen Ratnagar pertinently remarks, 'culture as used in archaeology is an archaeological construct: you equate it with the sociologist's or anthropologist's "tribe" or "people" or "society" at risk, leave alone the knotty problem of ethnicity. . . . In fact the entities with which archaeology deals can have no connection whatever with race or language labels, when as we saw, to translate "culture" in archaeology into "society" or "state" or "people" is itself tricky.'[54] She remarks that the question of immigration and not "invasion" of Aryans should more properly be addressed to historical linguistics for the 'languages do not spread out unless their speakers do'. The remarks could be applied with equal justification to the nature of stratification among the Ṛgvedic people, which problem has to be explored largely on the basis of Ṛgvedic material.[55]

NOTES

1 In taking a holistic view of the entire Vedic period Romila Thapar has to transcend the boundaries of time and space imposed by the sources. She visualizes not only the existence of senior and junior lineages but also the use of *kṛṣṇāyas* among the Ṛgvedic people. (*FLS*, Delhi, 1984, p. 94). However, it is well-known that although the *Ṛgveda* often mentions *ayas,* it is nowhere described as *kṛṣṇa-ayas*, 'the black metal'. That term occurs for the first time in the

Yajurveda. It would be more acceptable to conclude that *ayas*, described as 'golden' in a few Ṛgvedic passages, initially denoted copper or bronze and that when iron became known it was first called *kṛṣṇa-ayas.* Later, with the greater use of this metal, *ayas* came to mean iron. For references and full discussion see Dilip Chakrabarti, *The Early Use of Iron in India* (Delhi, 1992), p. 9, n. 58.

2 *FLS*, p. 46; also see *IHR*, XVI, p. 9, fn. 58.

3 Hunting is still an important occupation in the *Ṛgveda.* For the image of a huntsman setting a trap or laying a snare see Saul Migran, '*ṚV van*: An Old Hunting Term', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. 22 (1988), p. 273.

4 Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 72.

5 Hermann Kulke writes that the model of the clan bifurcating into senior and junior lineages provides a plausible explanation of the structural changes in later Vedic society, 'particularly the new social stratification during the Brāhmaṇa period'. 'The Rājasuya: A Paradigm of Early State Formation?' in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia*, Essays in Honour of J.C. Heesterman, in A.W. Van Den Hock, D.H.A. Kolff and M.S. Oort, eds. (Leiden, 1992), p. 189.

6 Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, s.v. *gotra*; P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, Pt 1, p. 479; D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Mumbai, 1956), p. 96. On the transformation of the institution of *gotra* (lineage) from a structural to a cultural phenomenon see Suvira Jaiswal, *IHR*, Vol. VI (1979-80), pp. 57-60.

7 *IHR*, XIX, p. 183.

8 Italics added.

9 Pierre Philippe Rey, 'Class Contradiction in Lineage Societies', *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 4, Nos. 13 and 14 (1979), pp. 51-2. For a review of Marxist anthropological writings see Maurice Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology: The History of A Relationship* (Oxford, 1983).

10 P. Rey, op. cit., p. 52.

11 Ibid., p. 51.

12 Ibid., p. 56.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., p. 51.

15 Ibid., pp. 55-6.

16 Just as caste becomes a metaphor for class in the ancient and early

medieval periods, lineage elements survive and play a role even in feudal and contemporary India, but this does not mean a continuation of the lineage mode of production. Fox speaks of 'stratified lineages' which are economically and politically differentiated in the Rajput kingdoms of early medieval times, Richard G. Fox, *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 23f.

17 *FLS*, p. 33.

18 Ibid., p. 18.

19 J. Gonda, *Vedic Literature: A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1975), p. 23.

20 This is based on Vishva Bandhu, ed., *Ṛgveda*, Pt VIII, Indices (Vishveshwaranand Institute, Hoshiarpur, 1966).

21 *Ṛgveda*, II. 36.5.

22 See K.R. Potdar, *Sacrifice in the Ṛgveda* (Mumbai, 1953); S. Jaiswal, 'Stratification . . .', *IHR*, XVI, pp. 27-9. Gonda expressed the view that the ritual known to the poets of the hymns was not identical with the complicated ceremonies of the later period; it grew even while the hymns were being composed, and the corpus was in the process of compilation, op. cit., p. 84.

23 *Ṛgveda*, VI.75.10.

24 VII. 103.1; 7; 8.

25 Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda* (Delhi, rpt., 1986), p. 384.

26 I. 164.45; X. 16.6; 71.8; 88.19; 90.12; 97.22, 109.4. In I. 15.5 the term refers to the *brāhmaṇacchaṃsin*.

27 *FLS*, p. 53.

28 Quoted by W. Caland in *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (Calcutta, 1931), p. 202.

29 See *ṚV*, X. 69.1, 5.9.

30 Curiously, in an article published in *Daedalus* (Spring, 1975), and reprinted in *Ancient Indian Social History* (Delhi, 1978, p. 47) Thapar wrote in connection with post-Vedic developments 'The *ārya-dāsa* dichotomy deriving from ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences in the Ṛgvedic texts was now replaced by the ārya-śūdra dichotomy.' The Aryans happened to be riding at the time!

31 'The Study of Society in Ancient India', Presidential Address, Ancient Indian History Section, Indian History Congress (December 1969, Varanasi), reprinted in *Ancient Indian Social History*, p. 220.

32 'Studies in Early Indian Social History', *IHR*, VI (1979-80), pp. 11-13, p. 14, fn. 4. Also see 'Varna Ideology and Social Change',

Social Scientist (Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4, March-April 1991), pp. 41f.

33 Hyla Stuntz Converse, 'The Agnicayana Rite: Indigenous Origin?', *History of Religions*, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (November 1974), pp. 81-95.

34 Fritz Staal, *The Science of Ritual* (Professor P.D. Gune Memorial Lectures, 1st Series, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 1982), pp. 46f. He quotes the view of Louis Renou that the *Ṛgveda* has always remained 'curiously alien to India', ibid., p. 41. Also see Kshetresh Chandra Chattopadhyaya, *Studies in Vedic and Indo-Iranian Religion and Literature*, Vidya Niwas Misra, ed. (Delhi, 1976), who writes (p. 99) that in early Vedic times the fire-altar was a simple chamber made of earth and the altar of Agnicayana made of bricks is a later development.

35 'Stratification . . .', *IHR*, XVI, p. 5. Like the Boar Myth of the eighth *maṇḍala* the story of the Apālā too, found in the same *maṇḍala* (VIII. 91), seems to have derived from a non-Aryan source. Hanns-Peter Schmidt (*Some Women's Rites and Rights in the Veda*, BORI, Pune, 1987, pp. 1-29) convincingly shows that the Apālā-sūkta refers to a female puberty rite but remarks that 'as an independent female puberty rite the Apālā-sūkta would be an isolated case within the whole of Indo-European tradition . . . and pastoral societies show little evidence for female puberty rites'. Hence he makes a forced attempt to connect it with the marriage ritual and is hard put to explain the etymology of 'Apālā'. He rejects von Schroeder's suggestion that *pāla* means 'protector' and so Apālā is 'a woman without a protector' on the ground that *pāla* is not a Vedic word. He takes it to be a phonetic variant of *apāra* meaning 'boundless'. This is far-fetched. The name may have been non-Aryan and the hymn which also speaks of the corn-field indicates assimilation of non-Aryan elements. Could it refer to Dāsa culture? We have referred to some matriarchal traits of the Dāsas who are said to have had women-warriors in their army (*IHR*, XVI, Nos. 1-2, p. 14).

36 R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Chaps. II and III.

37 'The Changing Concept of Gṛhapati', in *Society and Ideology in India*, Essays in Honour of Professor R.S. Sharma, D.N. Jha, ed. (Delhi, 1996), pp. 29-37. Infra, Chap. IV.

38 Hanns-Peter Schmidt, op. cit., p. 34, n. 5. Schmidt informs us that Geldner had at first accepted Yāska's interpretation but rejected it later in his translation of the *Ṛgveda*. Also see Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda* (Delhi, rpt., 1986), pp. 175-6, ns. 1 and 2 for the views of different scholars.

39 Erich Harold, 'Social Significance of a Vedic Allegory (*ṚV.* III. 31.1.2)', *Archiv Orientalini*, Vol. XXVI (1958), pp. 81-7. Also see B.S. Upadhyaya, *Women in the Ṛgveda*, Introduction.

40 Irawati Karve, 'Terminology and Kinship Usages in *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda'*, Vol. XX (1938-9), p. 216; Sarva Daman Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India*, pp. 19f, 39-43.

41 K.C. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., pp. 184-5; Monier-Williams' Dictionary gives the meaning of *napāt*, *naptṛ* and *naptāram* as 'descendant', 'offspring', 'son' in the *Ṛgveda* and says that in later language the meaning came to be restricted to 'grandson', s.v. *napāt.*

42 In the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* published by Chaukhamba Vidya Bhavan (Varanasi, 1991), this appears as I.65.7.

43 Romila Thapar, *FLS*, p. 66.

44 D.D. Kosambi, 'Combined Methods in Indology', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, Vol. VI (1963), pp. 181-4.

45 H.W. Bailey, *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1959), pp. 71-115.

46 Ibid., pp. 102-4.

47 Gherardo Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Its Origin* (Serie Orientale Roma LXII (Rome, 1989), pp. 31f.

48 Asko Parpola, 'The Coming of the Aryans to Iran and India and the Cultural and Ethnic Identity of the Dāsas', *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*, XVII, No. 2, p. 123, n. 203; R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryans* (Chennai, 1995), p. 4.

49 *ṚV*, X.49.3.

50 Compare Romila Thapar, 'Dāna and Dakṣiṇā as Forms of Exchange', *Indica*, Vol. 13 (1976), Nos. 1 and 2, p. 42, reprinted in idem, *Ancient Indian Social History* (1978), p. 111 with idem, *FLS*, p. 43. In *FLS* (p. 35) she writes 'In one hymn of the *Ṛgveda* it is clear that those who chose the *rājā* are distinct from the *viś*' and refers to *ṚV*, X.173.1. She asserts that the verse in question shows bifurcation between senior and junior lineages and hence distinguishes between those who 'chose' the *rājā* and the general *viś*. This led me to reexamine the verse and I pointed out that in fact it is the priest who pronounces 'I have consecrated thee', and there is no reference to *rājanyas* or a group of people as distinct from the *viś*. Ignoring this, Thapar refers to differences in the translation of the verb *ā-hṛ*, to 'consecrate', 'choose', or 'fetch'. The pertinent question, who does this, is not answered. The commentary of Sāyaṇa too explains this as an utterance or benediction given by the priest. Note the use of the singular,

'I consecrate thee' ('I have chosen thee'—Griffith).

51 *utsannā yajña-sattrāṇi, Atharvaveda*, XI.9(7).7. See *Atharvaveda* (Śaunaka), ed., Vishva Bandhu, Vishveshvarananda Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur, 1961.

52 For references see 'Stratification ...', *IHR*, XVI, p. 2, ns. 12 and 13; p. 31, n. 250.

53 For the archaic nature of the *pañcarātra sattra* of *puruṣa* Nārāyaṇa mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, see Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi, 2nd revd. edn., 1981), pp. 34-40.

54 Shereen Ratnagar, 'Archaeology: In Search of the Impossible', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIV, Nos. 45-6 (5-12 November 1994), pp. 2901-2. Also idem in D. Mandal's *Ayodhya: Archaeology after Demolition* (Delhi, 1993), p. 4.

55 Cautious use of historical lexicology and semantics is unavoidable for an investigation into these aspects of social history and need not be dismissed as 'conjectural history', a phrase coined by Radcliffe-Brown. The criticism is countered by Trautmann succinctly, 'this of course is polemic simplification, for every science finds conjecture indispensable; and the example of historical linguistics, which is surely a form of conjectural history, shows that historical conjectures, no less than functionalist ones, need not lack internal rigor or empirical verification. Radcliffe-Brown's slogan amounted to a denial of the possibility of an historical anthropology' (T.T. Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, Cambridge, 1981), p. 74.

4

Social Stratification in Early Buddhism and the Changing Concept of *Gṛhapati/Gahapati*

THE CONSOLIDATION OF PRIESTLY and ruling lineages as brāhmaṇa and *rājanya*/kṣatriya varṇa categories was accomplished in the later Vedic age through processes of fission and fusion of later Vedic tribes. Commoners engaged in agriculture and cattle-rearing were identified as vaiśya, the members of the *viś*. It is held that in the post-Vedic Pali sources the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya are verifiable categories, having acquired the characteristics of *jāti;* but such is not the case with the *vessa* (Skt vaiśya) and *sudda* (Skt śūdra) categories of the brahmanical varṇa scheme. The latter two figure merely as theoretical concepts not identifiable in real life situations.[1] So is the case with Cāṇḍāla, which is used in an abstract sense to represent the idea of low as a value.[2] Such a reading of the texts suggests that the śūdras and the Cāṇḍālas, who were originally tribes outside or on the margins of Vedic society, became generic terms now; and so did the *vessa* which could not have been a homogeneous category, as it encompassed the commoners of various tribes or *janas.* Even in the *Atharvaveda* there is mention of tribes speaking different tongues and following different customs (*nānādharmāṇam*).[3] The hereditary character of craft specialization and occupations would further contribute to differentiations among them; but the terms 'vaiśya' and 'śūdra' continued to have relevance for social interaction with other groups. I have discussed the evidence of Pāṇini on the hierarchization of communities dubbed as śūdra by

brahmanical writers. For the study of the 'vaiśya' category, the evidence of early Buddhist texts is illuminating.

The early Buddhist sources display a paradoxical attitude towards the 'vaiśya' of the brahmanical scheme. On the one hand the *vessa* and the *sudda* are regularly clubbed together, indicating their low position, and contrasted with the superior varṇa categories of *khattiyas* (Skt. kṣatriya) and brāhmaṇas; on the other hand, agriculture, cattle-keeping and trade—occupations assigned to vaiśyas in the brahmanical theory—are consistently rated high and described as *ucca kamma*, work of high status.[4] These were the functions of *gahapatis*, an influential and prestigious class in the Pali sources. They are often looked upon as a counterpart of or members of the vaiśya varṇa[5] and similar to Goyigāmā, the superior caste of agriculturists in Sinhalese society.[6] To explain this paradox we have to examine carefully the significance of '*gahapati*' and the *vessa* varṇa in the early Buddhist sources.

Frequent references to *gahapati* in the Buddhist Pali literature have prompted a number of contextual analyses[7] to bring out its various connotations. The picture presented is still not without certain ambiguities. Moreover, not much attention has been given to the Sanskrit etymon *gṛhapati* occurring in the Vedic literature, and it is assumed that since the term literally means the head or 'master' of *gṛha* or household, it must have been the designation of the head of a joint patriarchal family or household and the institution can be traced back to the *Ṛgveda*, where the term occurs a number of times. However, long survival of this term in its Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic forms (Pali *gahapati*, Prakrit, *gahavai*) and brahmanical and non-brahmanical contexts makes it imperative that we guard against reading later meanings into earlier passages and look for both textual and contextual support.

In the *Ṛgveda* Agni is described as *gṛhapati* at numerous places[8] and the epithet is generally seen as a reference to the sacred household-fire which must have been maintained in each household or *gṛha*. At one place Agni is said to have grown 'bright' and 'noble' in every *gṛha*, stirred by Mātariśvan.[9] But the precise nature of Ṛgvedic *gṛha* is difficult to define. It has been assumed[10] that it must have consisted of members of four

generations living together headed by a *paterfamilias*, who was known as the *gṛhapati*. Nevertheless, the presumption of such lineal extended families constituting single households among the early Vedic people appears to be a prochronism not backed by the internal evidence of the *Ṛgveda*.[11] The only verses cited in support of this view are from the wedding hymn found in the tenth *maṇḍala*, admittedly one of the latest and largest hymns, which appears to have been refashioned a number of times by the priestly hand. The language of the later verses of the hymn which expresses the wish that the bride may rule over her father-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law (verse 46) and sport with her sons and grandsons (verse 42) is closer to classical Sanskrit than Vedic[12] and may have been added when the institution of patrilineal extended family household was well-established among Vedic Aryans. But, as we shall see, even this hymn retains traces of a different and earlier conception of the *gṛhapati* and his household, which does not correspond to an extended lineage but suggests residential unity (clansmen living under the same roof or in close proximity) as also a ritual and economic entity. We have argued earlier[13] that the Ṛgvedic kinship structure suggests the existence of 'elementary' or nuclear families closely embedded in the larger clan, which was the basic socio-economic unit. There are frequent references to couples washing and pressing the *soma* juice and tending fire in their houses (*dama*), just as there are numerous indications of the collective functioning of groups called simply *janāḥ*, or *viś*, or by name. But there is hardly any indication of complex patrilineages constituting households in early Vedic times. The *gṛhapati* of the *Ṛgveda* was not a householder heading a patriarchal joint family but the head of an extended kin group which had a residential unity and formed one unit for social, economic and ritual purposes.

It seems that one of the significant attributes of the Ṛgvedic *gṛhapati* is his youthfulness. Several passages which speak of Agni as *gṛhapati* also describe him as wise or young, or the youngest of the gods, at the same time. In one verse[14] of the second *maṇḍala*, which is also repeated in the eighth *maṇḍala*, Agni is identified with different categories of priests along with *gṛhapati*. The narrative is reminiscent of the *sattra* sacrifices. In

a *sattra* sacrifice not only do all participants themselves perform the functions of various priests, but they also choose one of them as their *gṛhapati*, who leads the ritual. It is interesting that for a *sattra* the age of the participants including that of the *gṛhapati* has to be between seventeen and twenty-four years[15] and they perform the sacrifice jointly along with their wives who are also given *dīkṣā* or initiation for the purpose. In a critical study of the *śrauta* ritual Heesterman concluded that originally the *gṛhapati* was the leader of a band of 'trekking sacrificers' who performed the mobile sacrificial sessions, the so-called *yātsattras*, which involved booty-winning expeditions and collection of goods for the sacrifice (*saniyācana*); and the entire sacrificial activity was interwoven with the trekking and resettling activities of nomadic Aryan bands.[16] This view finds some support from the fact that in the *Ṛgveda* the *gṛhapati* is conceived of as young, manly, and bountiful[17] and the household accoutrement (*gārhapatyāni*) of the nomadic *gṛhapati* is described as the *asthūri*, a cart drawn by more than one horse.[18]

The *śrautasūtras* lay down that only members of the brāhmaṇa varṇa may participate in a *sattra* sacrifice; according to one view all the participants should be members of the same *gotra*.[19] Another view[20] recommends that if members of different *gotras* join in a *sattra* the ritual procedure should be regulated by the *gotra* of the *gṛhapati*. The emergence of separate varṇa categories is a later Vedic phenomenon, but such rules betray the original clan-based composition of early Vedic *sattras*. Thus originally the *gṛhapati* seems to have been the leader of the youth of his clan, responsible for the well-being, protection and prosperity of his kin-group.

It may be noted that the sacred fire of the *gṛhapati*, the *gārhapatyāgni*, was one of the three *śrauta* fires, the other two being the *āhavanīya* and the *dākṣiṇāgni*. These were kindled later, after the establishment of the *gārhapatya* fire.[21] *Gārhapatyāgni* is not to be confused with the *gṛhyāgni*, also known as *smārtāgni*, *vaivahikāgni* or *śālāgni* in the *gṛhyasūtras*.[22] The latter was the domestic fire of the individual household established by a householder described as *gṛhī* or *gṛhastha* for the purposes of *gṛhyakarma* or *pākayajñas*.[23] The rules and

structure of the *gṛhya* ritual were modelled along the same lines as those of the *śrauta* ritual,[24] but the context of the two were different. Thus, both the *smārta gṛhyāgni* and the *śrauta gārhapatyāgni* were established in the same manner and were to be maintained only by a householder whose wife was still alive; these could not be established or maintained by an unmarried person or a widower.Whereas the *smārta gṛhyāgni,* however,was established to meet the religious needs of an individual householder in the second stage of life (*gṛhastha),* the *śrauta gārhapatyāgni*, being the fire of *gṛhapati*, had a very different concern. It was meant to secure the well-being, fertility and wealth of an extended kin-group, of which the *gṛhapati* was the leader.[25]

Hence the bride of a *gṛhapati* was implored to be ever vigilant over the *gārhapatya* fire:[26] it was to maintain it that the gods had bestowed the bride on the husband.[27] She was asked to go to the houses of his kinsmen so that she could discharge her duties as the *gṛhapatnī,* and having control over the houses (*gṛhān*), speak up in the council (*vidatha*).[28] The mention here of houses in the plural indicates the special position of the *gṛhapatnī* with regard to the extended kin group of her husband. The verse is repeated in the *Atharvaveda*, which in an ensuing hymn[29] clearly enjoins upon the bride to worship the sacred household fire, thus making the connection clear. The bride is described as the extender of houses (*prathariṇī gṛhāṇām*)[30] and not just one house.We find here a reference to the families of her husband's clansmen and the wife is repeatedly advised to go to their houses[31] so that she may have 'easy control' of the houses (*suyamā gṛhebhyaḥ*)[32] and continue to speak in the clan-council, the *vidatha*, until her ripe old age.[33] Obviously, this is not an ordinary bride but the wife of a *gṛhapati*, one with substantial power and authority.

Incidentally, these two hymns of the *Atharvaveda* also provide unmistakable evidence of fraternal polyandry.[34] It appears that the young *gṛhapati*, the head of a household, was the eldest brother and his wife, the *gṛhapatnī*, enjoyed special status[35] and was accessible to the younger brothers. The importance of being the eldest son is indicated by the prayer, 'here give birth to

progeny for this husband, may this son of thine be of good primogeniture (*sujyaiṣṭhyo bhavat putrasta eṣaḥ*)'.[36] The role of the *gṛhapatnī* in the redistributive economy of the times is indicated by a verse[37] in which a cultivator sets aside three measures of grain for the Gandharvas and four for the *gṛhapatnī* at the harvest. It is in this context that the prayer for becoming *gṛhamedhī gṛhapati*, the *gṛhapati* who performs the household sacrifice, becomes intelligible.[38]

In a hymn of the *Ṛgveda* dedicated to the Season (Ṛtu) as a personified deity, Agni guides the sacrifice through the season (*ṛtunā*) with the *gārhapatya*.[39] This may be linked to the conception of Agni as the *gṛhapati*. Kane[40] rightly sees in this a clear mention of the *śrauta* fire, the *gārhapatyāgni*. The hymn invokes Agni to escort the gods to the three appointed places, apparently the three *śrauta* fires, and speaks of the offering of *soma* in the *potra, neṣṭra* and *brāhmaṇa* cups[41] obviously by the ritual experts designated correspondingly. The sacrificial ritual is well developed, but there is nothing to show that the division of the *soma* sacrifices into *ahīna* and *sattra* based on varṇa discrimination had already occurred. The priests had not yet become a hereditary, exclusive class and *yajña* was a group activity directed towards societal objectives.

At any rate, the description of the Maruts as performers of the *gṛhamedha*[42] reveals through projection at the divine level the concept of a household sacrifice performed by a band of young warriors acting themselves as priests. The Maruts are young and of the same age and being the sons of Rudra constitute a single kinship unit. They act as warriors as well as priests.[43] In the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*,[44] they are said to have Viṣṇu as their *sthapati*. It appears that *sthapati* and *gṛhapati* are sometimes used interchangeably to describe the same phenomenon. At one place the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*[45] speaks of Vrātyas as having held a sacrificial session (*sattra*) with Budha as their *sthapati*. Elsewhere, it mentions Dyūtāna Māruta as the *gṛhapati* of the Vrātyas.[46] We learn that he was the leader of the Maruts. According to Heesterman[47] the Maruts were the mythical prototype of the Vrātyas and the institution of *gṛhapati* was distinctive of the *sattra* sacrifice as well as that of the Vrātyas. A *sava* sacrifices

designated as *sthapatisava* or *vaiśyasava* is mentioned in a number of *śrautasūtras* and on this basis Caland[48] surmises that the *sthapati* was a vaiśya. In later times the institutions of the *sthapati* and the *gṛhapati* (Pali, *gahapati*) were found among those who were engaged in cultivation, crafts or architectural activities.[49] The Bahuvedaniyasutta of the *Majjhima Nikāya* mentions a Pañcakāṅga *thapati (sthapati)* in its subsection on the *gahapatis (Gahapati-vagga)*.

Romila Thapar is of the view[50] that initially 'the householding system' was common to both the *rājanyas* and the *viś*, but later with the changeover to agriculture and the decreasing importance of pastoralism, cattle raids of the *rājanyas* no longer produced as much wealth as earlier. So the *rājanyas* acquired power and converted themselves into kṣatriyas living off the prestations received from the *viś*, who cultivated land. Gradually 'the householding economy came to be associated with the lineages of the *viś* rather than those of the kṣatriyas' and the household became the unit of agricultural production. This eventually gave rise to the *gṛhapati* as a social category.

This perceptive reconstruction requires some modification. Thapar seems to be making a subtle distinction between the householding system and a householding economy based on agriculture[51] but does not clarify the concept of 'householding system'. Apparently she means the presence of the institution of *gṛhapati*; for she writes that the principal ritual role of the *gṛhapati* was that of the '*yajamāna*' (he who orders the sacrifice) and in later Vedic texts 'there are references to *gṛhapatis* and *yajamānas* which suggest kṣatriyas but do not preclude vaiśyas'.[52] What is overlooked is that in the later Vedic texts the status of *gṛhapati* is not confined to the *rājanyas* and the vaiśyas; it is open to all the three upper varṇas, who have the right to perform Vedic sacrifices. The later Vedic texts, highly conscious of the varṇa distinctions, even classify the sacrifices into the *ahīna* and the *sattra* categories, limiting the latter to the brāhmaṇa varṇa. It been shown that *gṛhapati* is indispensable in a *sattra*. Nor is it possible to argue that in every case the brāhmaṇa *gṛhapati* was only officiating for a kṣatriya patron. The internal structure of the *sattra* sacrifice clearly shows that the *gṛhapati* was not a

substitute for the *yajamāna* or patron. The benefit accruing out of a *sattra* was supposed to be shared equally by the participants of the *sattra*; and the *gṛhapati* was only their leader. In fact, the institution of the *sattra* as well as that of the *gṛhapati* predate varṇa divisions and relate to the collective functioning of the clans or extended kin-groups of the Ṛgvedic people.[53] We may note that even later in a changed economy when the *gṛhapati* is seen as the head of a patriarchal household based on agricultural earnings, the brāhmaṇa-*gṛhapatis* are no less prominent. Besides, the institution of *gṛhapati* also characterizes the Vrātyas in later Vedic literature; they are generally regarded as having been outside the varṇa system. According to the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa,* the Vrātyas neither study the Vedas nor practise trade or agriculture.[54]

The transformation of *gṛhapati* from a leader of the extended kin-group taking care of its ritual and material needs to the head of a complex household structured on patrilineal principles is no doubt connected with the shift from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary agriculture. I have argued elsewhere[55] that the existence of complex households in ancient times, whether matrilineal or patrilineal, was closely linked with the ownership of agricultural land. Land was held jointly and provided joint income and support to the members of the household even as it was managed or controlled by the head. Agriculture required the collective labour of family members or slaves and hired labourers; and as such complex households were more suited to this form of production. However, the *gṛhapati* does not seem to have been the head of an ordinary peasant household. He was a man of prestige and some authority, even in the age of the Buddha. Perhaps he was the leader or a leading member of an agricultural community.

In a scholarly study of the social environment of early Buddhism Uma Chakravarti has argued that the *gṛhapati* of the Pali texts was not merely the head of the household, but the 'head of the household as a production unit'.[56] This is a very important dimension and in my opinion even in early Vedic times the *gṛhapati* headed a production unit, even if the nature of production as well as that of the 'household' was quite different

in that age. The shift in meaning was not from 'denoting a householder to denoting an agriculturist'[57] but from the head of a production unit of one type to another. In the later form it was a patrilineal joint household which included both kin and non-kin such as slaves and hired labourers. The link between the two appears in a statement of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*[58] that the *gahapati* had to maintain the sacred fire (*gahapatiaggi*). The *Vinaya Piṭaka* definition of *gahapati*, which according to Wagle indirectly refers to his ownership right over the *gṛha* by the use of the term *ajjhavasati*, reiterates the continuation of his prerogative from early Vedic times. Strictly speaking, *gahapati* should not be translated as 'householder', which is the sense conveyed by such terms as *gṛhastha* or *gṛhī*. *Gṛhapati* was the 'master of the unit known as *gṛha*' and as such conveyed a sense of authority. Thus, the well-known Śailarwāḍi inscription[59] describes a peasant who works in his own fields as *kuṭumbika* but speaks of his son as the *gahapati*. Apparently the son had attained the position of a 'squire' or leader of the peasant-cultivators. The Upālisutta of the *Majjhima Nikāya*[60] speaks of *gahapati* Upāli of the Bālaka village sitting with the *gihī-pariṣayu* (*gṛhī-pariṣad*), which seems to have been the assembly of ordinary peasant householders. The clear differentiation of *gahapati* from *gihī* and *kuṭumbika* in these passages is striking.

Gahapatis are always identified by the name of their localities and it may not be without significance that the Pali texts do not mention more than one *gahapati* hailing from the same village or locality. Fick sees in them 'the gentry of the land, the lower land-owning nobility in contrast with the nobility which is related to princely houses, the khattiyas'.[61] They are invariably depicted as men of substance, located mainly in the countryside. *Gahapati* Meṇḍaka, who employed as many as 1250 cow-keepers (*gopālika*), whom he ordered to provide fresh milk to the Buddha and his followers, is described as a resident of Bhaddiya Nagara,[62] but *nagara* apparently meant a fortified place and not a town at this stage.[63] There are frequent references to store-houses of *gahapatis* and these must have been constructed at fortified nodes. The *gahapatis* donated such store-houses, known as *gahapati-kappiyabhūmi-kuṭi* or *gahapatika*, to the Buddhist

saṅgha.[64] The work (*kamma*) of the store-room keeper was 'low' in the Buddhist perception[65] and he must have been a dependent employee of the *gahapati.* Thus it is incorrect to view the *gahapatis* as 'subsistence farmers' and confuse this category with that of the ordinary peasant or *gṛhastha.*[66] The *gahapati's* special position and authority was inherited by his son, hence the *gahapati-putta* had a special status. According to Pāṇini the younger brother of a *gṛhapati* was known simply as *yuvā* and the status of *gṛhapati* passed on to the eldest son.[67] Sometimes it could also be enjoyed by a woman: in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* Viśākhā Migāramātā belongs to the *gahapati* category. She was an eminent follower of the Buddha and was even asked to give her advice on disciplinary matters in the *saṅgha.*[68] Of the ten stories of pious Jaina laymen narrated in the *Uvāsagadasao,*[69] as many as nine deal with the lives of *gahapatis,* described in a stereotyped manner as possessing vast agricultural lands, herds of cattle and hoarded wealth.

It has been pointed out[70] that although *gahapati* frequently occurs in the inscriptions of western India, an inscription from Karle uses the term *gahata* (*gṛhastha*) to indicate an ordinary householder. According to Wagle it was the more prosperous heads of households who were known as *gahapatis.*[71] Yet Sibesh Chandra Bhattacharya is right in asserting that the *gahapati* was more than a mere head of a household. His view that a 'gahapati' might have been the leader and representative of the traders of a village community is based on post-Maurya and pre-Gupta sources and there is no doubt that with the accumulated surplus from agriculture many *gahapatis* had turned to trade, which was flourishing in the centuries preceding and succeeding the turn of the Christian era. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* mentions *seṭṭhi-gahapatis* a number of times, but this is regarded as a later development.[72] However, this does not negate the view that in the preceding period *gahapatis* were notable entrepreneurs who organized the cultivation of large tracts with hired labour and slaves, and were the important tax payers.[73] Such *gahapatis* were also found among brāhmaṇas who owned and supervised the cultivation of *brahmādeya* lands and had to pay taxes to the king.[74] This institution survived until the time of Kumārila who states that

the *gahapati* does not work on his land himself but employs hired labourers or *karmakāras*.[75] The Buddhist sources do not provide a single instance of a *gahapati* cultivating the field with his own or his family's labour, although no doubt he had to be familiar with the process and would have to see that the work of preparing the field, sowing seeds and watering was done on time.[76] An agriculturist *gahapati* could be described as *kassaka-gahapati*,[77] as distinct from *seṭṭhi-gahapatis* who were located in towns.[78] (We may compare this to the term *kassaka-brāhmaṇa*. In a Jātaka story a *kassaka-brāhmaṇa* is the owner of one thousand karīsas of land. He goes to the field along with his workmen to supervise ploughing).[79] However, subsistence farmers are described simply as *kassakas* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*.[80]

Wagle pointed out that the term *gahapati* was not generally applied to the members of kṣatriya clans, or the king's servants. Uma Chakravarti explains this on the ground that the kṣatriya clans of the *gaṇa-rājyas* held land in common and there was no private ownership. A *gahapati* was in her view an independent owner-cultivator using his family labour as well as that of hired workers and slaves, depending on his means. Hence, she argues, the category of *gahapati* was conspicuously absent in the *gaṇa-rājyas* and there were no '*khattiya-gahapatis*'. On the other hand, the bulk of land in the contemporary monarchies was in the hands of *gahapatis* where they constituted the dominant peasantry. Although it is quite plausible that the collective political functioning of the *gaṇarājyas* should have its roots in communal ownership of land, a continuation of tribal traditions in pre-state polities, available evidence is more in favour of the thesis of Walter Ruben[81] who held that the members of the ruling kṣatriya clans in the north-eastern republics had their own separate estates. In the *Vinaya Piṭaka*[82] the Śākya *rājā* Bhaddiya speaks of transferring his estate to his sons and brothers before accepting monkhood. The title *rājā*, in this context does not mean a monarch, for the heads of all the families of a ruling clan held this title. Another Śākya, Mahānāma, also took over the management of his family estate after the death of his father and gave detailed instructions about its agricultural management to his younger brother Aniruddha when he thought of joining the

saṅgha. It seems likely that the ownership of land in the *gaṇa-rājyas* was confined to members of the ruling clan and it could not be alienated without the consent of the clan. Since the heads of the households of the ruling clan preferred the title of *rājā* or '*kṣatriya*', as they enjoyed political power too, they were obviously distinguished from the *gahapatis*. Nevertheless, Śākya Mahānāma is mentioned in the subsection of the *gahapatis* (*gahapati-vagga*) owing to the similarity of his occupation with that of a *gahapati*; and Śuddhodana, the father of the Buddha, is described ploughing his field—even if only as a ritual.[83] The linguistic expressions *kuru-gārhapatam* mentioned by Pāṇini,[84] and *Vṛjji-gārhapatam* mentioned by his commentator Kātyāyana while explicating on the former, clearly refer to the institution of *gṛhapati* among the Kurus and Vṛjjis, who had *gaṇarājyas* in the time of the Buddha. Pāṇini, who is generally placed between 500 and 300 BC, referred to a contemporary practice. The phrases need not be interpreted to imply the existence of a distinct *gahapati/gṛhapati* class in these oligarchies, the heads of the households of the ruling clans of Kuru and Vajji *gaṇarājyas* themselves followed the *gṛhapati* tradition of 'householding' and like the *gahapatis* managed their agricultural lands with hired and slave labour.

Large farms worked with slave and hired labour characterized the economy of large parts of eastern India in the age of the Buddha,[85] and the system seems to have continued into the early centuries of the Christian era in north-eastern and western India. It becomes much less conspicuous in the subsequent centuries. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya recommends that under the direction of the Administrator (*samāhartṛ*) secret agents disguised as *gṛhapatis* should find out the number of fields, houses and families in those villages in which they are stationed.[86] In the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin and the *Mṛcchakatika* of Śūdraka the *gṛhapati* appears as the head or judge of a village.[87]

Gahavai, the Prakrit form of *gṛhapati*, occurs in a number of verses[88] of the *Gāthā-saptaśatī* and in one[89] he is also described as a *hālika* or ploughman. It appears that there was a gradual lowering of the *gṛhapati* status and the term became divested of its earlier meaning (as happened with the word *dāsa*). It came to

be applied to ordinary peasant householders, an equivalent of the *kuṭumbin* of early medieval times.[90] But the notion of a difference continued to linger and it is pointed out that in some early medieval sources while the family head is called *gṛhapati*, the wife is described as *kuṭumbinī*.[91] The disappearance of *gahapatis* may be connected with structural change in the countryside introduced by the system of land grants along with fiscal and administrative rights and the emergence of Indian feudalism.

Nevertheless, in the time of the Buddha *gahapati* was an elite category comparable to the brāhmaṇa and the kṣatriya, and figures as one of the seven jewels of the king. The *Vinaya Piṭaka*[92] says, 'excepting the king and he who is in the king's service, and the brāhmaṇa, he who remains is called a *gahapati*'. This is sometimes quoted to show that *gahapati* here refers to the class of cultivators. But in my opinion this passage is in fact enumerating the elite groups. It is incorrect to regard *gahapatis* as a group similar to Goyigāmās, who constitute a numerous caste of land-owning agriculturists in Sri Lanka, as even within the *gahapati* family the status of *gahapati* was confined to just one member, the head.

The growth of wide economic disparities and upper-class contempt for those who had to depend on manual labour must have accelerated the process of caste formation among the Vedic masses, known as the vaiśyas in later Vedic times. The tendency of joining together the vaiśya and śūdra categories is evident even in some later Vedic sources and R.S. Sharma[93] quotes a passage from the *Yajus* collections which states that the vaiśyas and the śūdras were created together (contrary to the *Puruṣa-sūkta* view which gives priority to the creation of vaiśya and ranks him higher than the śūdra). The clubbing together of the '*vessa*' and '*sudda*' is conspicuous in the early Pali texts showing a general fall in social status of those who were engaged in manual work. Divergent socio-economic status of crafts and occupations must have encouraged fissioning and the formation of separate castes among the general category of vaiśyas. I have suggested earlier that one of the reasons for acceptance of Jainism by traders could be the fact that Jainism forebade agriculture as

causing *himsā* (violence) to insects in tillage. This emphasized dissociation from low-status manual agricultural work. The changed material environment also affected the brahmanical perceptions as agriculture was increasingly assigned to śūdra varṇa and the third varṇa came to be looked upon primarily as the trader. The later Dharmāsutras and Smṛti literature continue to repeat the later Vedic formulation about agriculture as the function of the vaiśya. Nevertheless, it is given low priority; trade, commerce and financial transactions become the main vaiśya occupations. It is pointed out that in the enumeration of the duties of a vaiśya in the *Manusmṛti* agriculture comes last and is usually qualified by the expression 'and also' (*eva ca*).[94]

In pointing out changes in the concept of the duties of vaiśyas and śūdras we do not wish to imply that this symbolizes a deliberate change of occupations on account of status considerations. Such mobility would depend largely on material circumstances. What is intended is to account for the shift in the conceptualization of varṇa categories, as these had to be in harmony with the changing material milieu and emerging social groups which acquired their identity on a regional and occupational basis rather than in terms of varṇa. The proliferation of *jātis* within the varṇa system has been a gradual process aided by fission and by expansion into tribal areas and induction of new groups into the system. But in the early centuries preceding the Christian era, the situation was still fluid. It is held[95] that in a number of later Vedic texts marriage between vaiśya and śūdra is considered normal, but perhaps these reflect the early stages of the assimilation of non-Vedic tribal śūdras in the Vedic society. Wagle's study of early Pali sources does not suggest a caste society compartmentalized into a large number of endogamous groups, the term *jāti* being used in the literal sense of 'birth' rather than 'caste', but the fact that marriages[96] were arranged on consideration of birth, lineage and status through mediators even among non-brāhmaṇa and non-kṣatriya groups provides the appropriate background for the growth of *jātis*, fully attested in the later Dharmasūtra and Smṛti literature. Subdivisions within the *khattiya, vessa* and *sudda* groups are mentioned in the Brāhmaṇadhammika Sutta of *Cūlavagga*.[97]

NOTES

1 Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi, 1987), pp. 104-8.

2 Ibid., p. 106, fn. 69. Nevertheless, Cāṇḍālas are mentioned regularly as a specific *hīna jāti* along with the *vena, nesāda, ratthakāra* and *pukkusa* in the Pali texts. That they were originally an aboriginal tribe is shown by the fact that they had their own dialect. R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras* . . . , p. 139.

3 *Atharvaveda*, XII. 1.45.

4 *Vinaya Piṭaka*, IV.6, quoted R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p. 137; Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 112.

5 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras*, p. 98; idem, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*, pp. 141, 165; S.C. Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society* (Calcutta, 1978), p. 117.

6 Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 116.

7 Richard Fick, *The Social Organisation in North-East India* (tr. Sishir Kumar Maitra, Calcutta, 1920) examined the data from the Jātakas. Narendra Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Mumbai, 1966) makes a meticulous study of the term as it occurs in early canonical literature of the Buddhists. Other notable studies are Sibesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society from c. 2nd Century B.C. to c. 4th Century A.D.*, and Uma Chakravarti, op. cit.

8 *Ṛgveda*, I.12.6; 36.5; 60.4; II.1.2; IV.9.4; 11.5; V.8.1; 2; VI.15.13; 16.42; 48.8; VII.1.1; 15.2; 16.5; VIII.60.19; 102.1; X.91.10; 118.6; 122.1.

9 Ibid., I.71.4. Mātariśvan is a semi-divine being who is supposed to have brought Agni to Bhṛgu. Ralph T.H. Griffith, *The Hymns of the Ṛgveda* (Delhi, rpt., 1986), p. 47a, n. 4.

10 R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, p. 48; A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, s.v., *gṛhapati*.

11 Supra, pp. 162f.

12 *Ṛgveda*, X.85. See Shakuntala Rao Shastri, *Women in the Vedic Age* (Mumbai, 1954), pp. 13-18.

13 *kavirgṛhapatiryuvā, Ṛgveda*, I.12.6; VII.15.2; VIII. 102.1. Also see VI.48.8.

14 *Ṛgveda*, II.1.2 and X.91.2.

15 P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, II, Pt 2 (Pune, 1941), p. 1241.

16 J.C. Heesterman, 'Householder and Wanderer', *Contributions to*

Indian Sociology, XV (1981), pp. 251-71.

17 VI.53.2.

18 VI.15.19. *Ṛgveda*, V.12.6 speaks of the movable abode (*kṣaya*) of the wandering band, the offspring of Nahuṣa. A vivid picture of a movable dwelling which provided shelter not only to the household fire but to men together with their cattle, and was rich in kine, horses and progeny, is found in the *Atharvaveda*. As translated by Whitney this reads: 'Home to kine, to horses, whatever is born in the dwelling; thou rich in births (*vijā-*) rich in progeny (*prajā-*) we fasten thy fetters. Thou coverest within the fire, the men together with cattle (*paśu*); thou rich in births, rich in progeny, we unfasten thy fetters.' *Atharvaveda*, IX.3.13.-14. Also 'Like a woman (*vadhū*), O dwelling, we carry thee where we will.' Ibid., IX.3.24.

19 P.V. Kane, op. cit., p. 1242.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., pp. 994-5.

22 Ibid., Vol. II, Pt I, pp. 678-9.

23 *Manusmṛti*, III.67; *Kāṭhakagṛhyasūtra*, 47.1-2; Kane, op. cit.

24 Brian K. Smith, 'The Unity of Ritual: The Place of Domestic Sacrifice in Vedic Ritualism', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, XXIX, 1986, pp. 79-96.

25 *gṛhapativiśām*, *Ṛgveda*, VI. 48.8.

26 *asmin gṛhe gārhapatyāya jāgṛhi*, *Ṛgveda*, X.85.27. Also see *Atharvaveda*, XIV.1.21.

27 *bhago aryamā savitā purandhir-mahyam tvādurgārhapatyāya devāḥ*. *Ṛgveda*, X.85.36; *Atharvaveda*, XIV.1.50.

28 *gṛhān gaccha gṛhapatnī yathāso vaśinī tvam vidathamā vadāsi*, *Ṛgveda*, X.85.26. It is also found in *Atharvaveda*, XIV.1.20.

29 *syonemamagniṃ gārhapatyāṃ saparya*, ibid., XIV.2.18 and *yadā gārhapatyamasarpayet*, verse 20. Also see ibid., verse 23.

30 Ibid., verse 26.

31 Ibid., verse 75.

32 Ibid., verse 17.

33 *Ṛgveda*, X.85.27; *Atharvaveda*, XIV.1.21.

34 Sarva Daman Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India*, pp. 58f.

35 The high status enjoyed by Draupadi in the household of the Pāṇḍavas reflects this tradition.

36 *Atharvaveda*, XIV.2.24. Translated by Whitney.

37 Ibid., III.24.6.

38 *gṛhaṃdehī gṛhapatiṃ mā kṛṇu*, ibid., XIX.31.13.

39 *Ṛgveda*, I.15.12.

40 Kane, op. cit., p. 981.

41 See verses 2, 5 and 9 of the hymn.
42 *Ṛgveda*, 56.14; VII.59.10.
43 A.A. Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology* (Delhi, rpt., 1971), p. 80.
44 *Baudhayāna Śrauta Sūtra* (ed. W. Caland, 3 vols., Calcutta, 1904-24, rpt., New Delhi, 1982), XVIII.26.
45 *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (tr. W. Caland, Calcutta, 1931), XXIV.18.2.
46 Ibid., XVII.1.7.
47 *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, V.5.9.4 quoted by J.C. Heesterman, 'Vrātya and Sacrifice', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, VI (1962-3), p. 17.
48 Caland, op. cit., p. 466.
49 In the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, II.24.39 *sthapati* is the leader of the architects. Sudarśanācārya, the commentator of the *Āpastambagṛhyasūtra* identifies *sthapati* as a vaiśya. See his comment on *Āpastambagṛhyasūtra*, XIII.5.3 (Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi, 2nd edn., 1971), p. 207. Also see *Majjhima Nikāya* (tr. Rahula Sankrityayana, 2nd edn., Nalanda, 1964), p. 239, fn. 1 and *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (ed. L. Feer, 6 vols, PTS, London, 1884-1904), Vol. V, pp. 348f, for Purāṇa and Īsidatta, the two brothers, both being *thapati* (architects).
50 *FLS*, pp. 36-8.
51 But see ibid., p. 39 where it is said in the context of post-Vedic agricultural economy, 'The *viś* was by now characterized by the householding system.'
52 Ibid., p. 37.
53 Heesterman has argued that the institution of *dakṣiṇā* reflects an earlier stage when the entire clan participated in the ritual, and wealth was shared. J.C. Heesterman, 'Reflections on the Significance of the Dakṣiṇā', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, III (1959-60), pp. 241-58.
54 *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*, XVII.1.2. For an original alternative interpretation of the Vrātya, see Heesterman, note 47 above.
55 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', *IHR*, Vol. VI, Nos. 1-2 (July 1979-January 1980), p. 60.
56 Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., pp. 65-93.
57 Ibid., p. 86.
58 *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols, PTS, London, 1885-1900), V, pp. 44-5. N. Wagle, op. cit., pp. 151-2.
59 Jas Burgess and Bhagwanlal Indraji, *Cave Temples of Western India* (Delhi, rpt., 1976), p. 38. D.D. Kosambi, *JBBRAS*, 30, 1957, pp. 50-71.
60 *Majjhima Nikāya*, Upāli-Sutta (No. 56), *Vinaya Pitaka* (ed. H.

Oldenberg, 5 vols, London, 1879-83), Vol. I, p. 350, *Aṅguttara Nikaya*, II, p. 182.

61 Richard Fick, op. cit., p. 253.

62 *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, V.117; *Vinaya Piṭaka*, I, pp. 240-44, 274.

63 N. Wagle, op. cit., pp. 23-7.

64 *Sutta Piṭaka*, II, pp. 1163-4.

65 *Vinaya Piṭaka*, IV, p. 6.

66 Uma Chakravarti, *Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, pp. 92-9, 178; idem, 'Towards A Historical Sociology of Stratification in Ancient India, Evidence from Buddhist Sources', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XX, No. 9, 2 March 1985, p. 359.

67 *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, IV, 4.90; IV.1.64.

68 *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Vol. I, pp. 26-7; Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., pp. 136-7.

69 A.F. Rudolf Hoernle, ed., *Uvasagadasao* (Calcutta, 1960.)

70 S.C. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 131.

71 N. Wagle, op. cit., p. 156.

72 Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., pp. 73f.

73 *kassako gahapatiko kārakārako rāsivaddako, Dīgha Nikāya* (T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, eds., 3 vols, PTS, London, pp. 1890-1911), Vol. I, p. 61; tr. T.W. Rhys Davids, *The Dialogue of the Buddha* (London, rpt., 1973), Vol. I, p. 77.

74 Uma Chakravarti cites the Mahāsudassana Sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which describes both *gahapatis* as well as brāhmaṇas as tax payers, op. cit., p. 73.

75 *Tantra-Vārttika* of Kumārila (Eng. tr. Pune, 1910), p. 3185; Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., p. 80, fn. 69.

76 *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, I, pp. 230, 239-40.

77 Ibid., pp. 241-2.

78 Unlike the *gahapatis, seṭṭhi-gahapatis* were located in the urban centres. Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., pp. 74-5.

79 *Jātaka*, III. 293; Fick, op. cit., p. 243.

80 *Dīgha Nikāya*, II, p. 131.

81 Walter Ruben, 'Some Problems of the Ancient Indian Republics' in *K.M. Ashraf Commemoration Volume* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 5-29.

82 *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Vol. II, p. 182.

83 *Nidāna Kathā* (ed. Dharmananda Kosambi, Pune, 1915), pp. 72-3.

84 *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, VI.2.42.

85 Devraj Chanana, *Slavery in Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1960).

86 R.P. Kangle, ed., *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra*, II.35.8 (Vol. I, Mumbai,

1970). Earlier, Freepeasants or subsistence farmers are designated *karṣakas* and clubbed together with the cowherds, traders, artisans, labourers and slaves. Cf. II.35.4. For references to *gṛhapatis* see ibid., V.3.22; XII.4.1; XIII.3.44.

87 *Daśakumāracarita*, VIII.207; *Mṛcchakaṭika*, II.14/15.8 quoted in Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v., *gṛhapati*.

88 *Gāthā Saptaśatī* (ed. and tr. Radhagovinda Basak, Calcutta, 1971), II.72; III.97; IV.59; V.7; VI.100.

89 Ibid., II.7.

90 The *Mahāpurāṇa* (8.6) of Puṣpadanta (tenth century) describes the social and economic status of *chettavais* (Skt. *kṣetrapatis*, owners of plots) as superior to that of *gharavais (gahapatis)*. Quoted in B.N.S. Yadava, 'Historical Investigation into Social Terminology in Literature: A Problem of the Study of Social Change (Mainly in the Context of Early Medieval Northern India)', Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, 53rd Session (Warangal, 1993), p. 25.

91 Gy. Wojtilla, *Les Communautes Rurales* (Paris, 1982), p. 125 quoted in R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India* (Delhi, 1987), p. 175.

92 *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Vol. III, p. 222; I.B. Horner, *Book of the Discipline*, Vol. II, p. 67.

93 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras* . . . , p. 68.

94 *Manusmṛti*, I.90; VIII, 410; X.79 quoted by S.C. Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 120, 259.

95 R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras* . . . , pp. 68-70; S.C. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 112.

96 N. Wagle, op. cit., pp. 96-104.

97 *evam dhamme viyāpanne vibhinnā suddavessikā pithū vibhinnā khattiyā* 'Thus righteousness being destroyed; the śūdras and vaiśyas were divided, the kṣatriyas were also divided into many ways'. *Cūlavagga* (ed. and tr. Sister Vijira, Mahabodhi Society, Sarnath, U.P., 1942), pp. 150-1.

5

Caste and Hinduism: The Changing Paradigms of Brahmanical Integration

> Is there then no principle in Hinduism [to] which all Hindus, no matter what their other differences are, feel bound to render willing obedience? It seems to me there is, and that principle is the principle of caste.
>
> B.R. AMBEDKAR,
> 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India', *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, 1987, p. 336.

IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE nineteenth century A. Barth asserted[1] that caste was the 'express badge of Hinduism . . . a religious factor of the first order'. The point was made even more forcefully by Max Weber, who regarded caste as fundamental to Hinduism, providing the institutional framework. Weber, however argued[2] that Hinduism was not a religion in the Western sense of the term, as the concept of 'dogma' was missing from it. This latter idea continues to be a central point of discussion. It is argued that Hinduism, like Buddhism, is not a religion but a way of life.[3] The concept of religion as understood in the West involves the notion of exclusive truth but this is not the case with Vedic, Brahmanical, Buddhist or Tantric systems, where what counts is lineage, affiliation, cult or tradition, not dogma. It is asserted that orthopraxy and not orthodoxy is the operative concept and in fact there are no 'true religions' in India.[4] However, such statements representing the Christian theological view-point may

be regarded as hardly adequate from a social-anthropological perspective, as this means the denial of the universality of religion. On the other hand, religion is counted among the universal categories of culture and it is argued that in the past there has never been a society without religion.[5] In my opinion, if in modern societies beliefs and prescribed doctrines are given greater importance than the ritual, it is because of the receding social role of ritual. In pre-modern societies ritual was a tool for social cohesion and control. In modern societies these aims are achieved through other methods, and religion becomes more and more a matter of individual concern.

However, in Hinduism orthodoxy is to be proved in the realm of ritual and social behaviour, albeit qualified by caste and region, but there is no such insistence in the realm of ideas and beliefs. This has led Heinrich von Stietencron to argue that Hinduism is not one religion but an association of the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Smārta, and other religions.[6] But such fragmentation would amount to equating 'religion' with 'sect' or 'cult'. Surely the concept of 'religion' is wider and while it provides space for the existence of a number of sects or cults within its fold, it is distinguished by certain normative moral codes and perceptions which embrace almost all areas of life and reveal its cultural unity. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of the forms and perceptions of the divine, it is the unifying pattern of socio-religious relations which provides Hinduism its essential unity[7] and establishes its claim to be identified as a religion.

Let us elaborate. Hinduism shows a remarkable flexibility in assimilation of even contradictory religious and philosophical concepts. The coexistence of prehistoric forms of worship (of the sacred tree, animals, anthills, etc.) along with the sophistication of Vedānta and Sāṃkhya is not merely a question of long continuities and tolerance of all viewpoints. Its roots lie in the development of a hierarchical social structure to which Brahmanism provided ideological support by denying the equality of men in this world even in theory. Thus it was easy to countenance divergent customs and beliefs as long as their practitioners could be fitted into the mosaic of the social hierarchy in which power and purity went hand in hand, in opposition to

those who were dependent and impure.[8] The system evolved through the centuries in specific historical conditions; and its beginnings are embedded in the ecology of the Aryan cattle-keepers, who had developed two distinct classes of specialists, warriors and priests.[9] The former specialized in cattle-raids and thus increased the cattle-wealth of their tribes and the latter claimed to do so by securing the blessings of the gods through their specialization in the sacrificial ritual. Thus, the separation of the *brahma* (priestly) and the *kṣatra* (warrior) elements and the superior status of the former, which Dumont[10] explains in terms of the religious mentality of the Indians, is in fact a continuation of an old pastoralist tradition, not unique to the Aryans and with a perfectly rational explanation.[11] India has had a continuous history for thousands of years and as such has carried the weight of long traditions, but this does not mean that it has remained static. While maintaining the semblance of continuity it has made significant transitions and transformations in the spheres of ideology and social organization in response to changing material—and social—conditions.[12]

Thus our definition of Hinduism takes an integrated view of Hindu beliefs and practices and regards the social system not only as an underpinning providing support to the edifice of Hinduism but as its important constitutive element. Such a perspective is sometimes criticized on the ground that it involves conflation of Hinduism with the social organization of Hindus, and goes against the autonomy of religious studies by making the study of religion 'entirely encompassed within the study of society'.[13] As an alternative, Brian K. Smith proposes to define Hinduism as '*the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda*'.[14] He finds those thematic definitions of Hinduism that lay emphasis on the doctrine of transmigration, *karma* or *dharma* as unsatisfactory for they do not enable us to differentiate between Hinduism and other Indic religions, such as Buddhism or Jainism, which share these concepts. On the other hand, he also rejects the views of those[15] who give the caste system a central place in their definition of Hinduism on the ground that 'within the discipline of academic and humanistic

study of religion there is a difference between religion and the social structure it legitimises' and 'Hinduism clearly entails far more than caste'.[16]

It may be argued, however, that the so-called 'tolerance' of Hinduism and its amorphous, all-inclusive character cannot be understood unless the social structure of those who came to be known as 'Hindu' and were regarded as the believers be taken into consideration. For, the unifying and identifying factor was the institution of caste which had the power to excommunicate or admit an individual or group, not acceptance or rejection of any moral or philosophical doctrine.[17] There is much truth in the remark of Louis Dumont that in India all that appears to be social is in fact religious and 'all that appears to be religious is in fact social'.[18] In a way Brian Smith makes a concession to this fact by agreeing with Wilfred Smith that there is no Hinduism apart from the Hindus and incorporating this idea into his definition of Hinduism. But his insistence that all Hindus call upon the authority of the Vedas to legitimize their doctrines and practices and hence '*legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda*, is definitive of Hinduism' does not bear deeper scrutiny. There have been movements within the fold of Hinduism which have rejected not only the authority of the brāhmaṇas, a point Brian K. Smith is willing to concede, but also that of the Vedas. For example, the Lingāyats, who constitute an important Śaivite sect, not only rejected the authority of the brāhmaṇas and ritualism but also the Vedas. The *Cennabasavapurāṇa* speaks of an incident in which Lingāyats, in order to humiliate a Vedic scholar, had the Veda recited by the dogs.[19] Within the fold of Śrī-vaiṣṇavism, the Tamil sect of the Teṅgalai too renounced the Veda.[20] If later a section of the Lingāyats claiming to be *śuddha* or 'pure' Vīraśaivas began to seek legitimation from the Veda, it was because like all other protest movements originating as a reaction to brahmanical orthopraxy and caste inequities the Lingāyat movement too failed to establish a fraternal community devoid of caste distinctions and developed a parallel caste system with the Ayyas (Ācāryas) or Jangama priests at the apex.

Smith's argument that the caste system is not exclusive to Hindus in India and followers of other religions in India such as

the Buddhists, Jainas, Muslims and Christians too have caste divisions is not quite valid. For whereas in the non-Hindu communities the system of caste is an aberration, a survival among converts from Hinduism, retained and fostered by the continuation of earlier patterns of social relations even after conversion, in Hinduism caste is central. Not only does it have religious sanction but it has provided the *reason for existence.* The religious pluralism evinced by Hinduism is a consequence of the brahmanical integrative process which allowed freedom of belief and worship but insisted on conformity in praxis, which alone was crucial for the maintenance of social hierarchy. This does not mean that doctrinal issues have been non-existent. These have been discussed and debated in various schools and sects of Hinduism and even define its *sampradāyas*, but it is impossible to establish a criterion of orthodoxy applicable to all Hindus on the basis of doctrinal principles derived from a canon or scripture.

Brian Smith puts forward an interesting reason for making his definition of Hinduism centre on the legitimizing reference to the Veda. By doing so, he explains that Hinduism ceases to be totally different from Western religions rooted in a fixed canon like the Bible or Koran. Thus, he wishes to avoid the general orientalist approach of viewing Asian religions as 'wholly other' and 'exotic'. In the process, he over-valorizes Vedic metaphor in later texts, ignoring changes in the structure of brahmanical beliefs and practices. He provides Hinduism with a canon which, unlike the Bible or the Koran, is not read or reinterpreted by the believers, but is used only as a category for creating orthodoxy. He admits that Hindus 'appear' to use only the 'outside' of the Veda, oblivious to what is 'inside'.[21] Such arbitrary semitization of Hinduism is an epistemological necessity for Smith's discourse, but does little justice to the textual evidence or the historical process through which Hinduism evolved. We could well argue that this attempt constitutes Orientalism in the reverse: for separating the religious from the social is alien to Hindu tradition. The very term *dharma*, generally translated 'religion', has both religious and social dimensions in indigenous usage.

Moreover, although it may not be historically correct to say that the concept of a Hindu religion evolved as a result of

confrontation with Christianity, the religion of the colonial rulers in the nineteenth century,[22] we would not be wrong in asserting that confrontation with Islam, another Semitic religion, introduced a cultural and religious dimension into the term Hindu, which originally had a geographic connotation. 'Hindu' seems to have been used in a negative sense in early medieval Persian sources to denote indigenous peoples following a non-Islamic religion and was accepted by the people themselves as interaction with the Muslim ruling class led to a growing awareness of differences in religious and cultural practices. It has been pointed out[23] that the Persio-Turkic culture dominated the court of Indian Muslim rulers who regarded it a matter of prestige to claim Iranian connections. In times of peace the interaction between the Turks and the indigenous population would lead to a cultural synthesis and appropriation of the behaviour pattern of the new ruling class, but in a situation of political antagonism and socio-economic tension the feeling of being 'the other' would be intensified, generating awareness of a separate identity. Destruction and desecration of brahmanical shrines by some Muslim rulers, even if for political expediency rather than religious conviction, would naturally create a feeling of unity among all those communities which regarded these places as sacred and strengthen the notion of a shared tradition. The idea of a Hindu religion in contradistinction to Islam is found in the *bhakti* poetry of medieval saints such as Kabir and Dadu and is illustrated clearly in the 'Hindu-Turk Samvād',[24] a poem of the Maharashtrian saint Eknātha, who lived in the sixteenth century. The poem shows the Hindu castigating the Turk on the ground that although both 'Hindu' and 'Mussalman' are God's creation, the Turk has to catch a Hindu and make him a Muslim. The Turk, on the other hand, ridicules the Hindu for his adherence to caste rules, image worship and belief in the Vedas and Purāṇas. Later in the same region the poet Bhūṣaṇa too speaks of the long-standing enmity between the Hindu and Muslim religions (*dīna*) and credits Śivāji and Chatrasāla Bundela with having preserved *svadharma* and *Hinduānī*.[25] Such sentiments even if expressed by a court poet point to an assertion of Hindu community identity in the face of an external threat.

Of course, the *Hinduānī* and Hindu *dharma* of Bhūṣaṇa's conception was a typical upper caste notion which referred to the authority of the Vedas, the Purāṇas and Smṛtis and laid stress on growing a *choṭī* and wearing the *janeyū (yajñopavīta).* Political rivalry and loss of royal patronage would have spurred assertions of antagonistic culture traits among disaffected nobles and priests. But there was no attempt to merge either vertically or horizontally the fragmented identities of indigenous communities by invoking a communal or religious issue. It is rightly held that the ideology of communalism is a modern phenomenon. In any case, as many Indian Muslims were converts from the lower castes, the Islamic community too did not present a monolithic whole. It has been argued[26] that the caste hierarchy was beneficial for the ruling classes, as it allowed the land-holding peasant to have cheap labour and craft services from depressed menial castes in the petty mode of production and thus created greater surplus to be mopped up by the rulers, Hindu or Muslim. Hence, there is no attack on the caste system even for the purposes of proselytization in medieval Muslim sources. I may add that brahmanized rulers of the early medieval period often claimed to be the protectors of the varṇa system and regulated its functioning through the office of the *dharmādhikārī* held by a learned, *kulīna* brāhmaṇa. The role of the ruling authority in this regard had become so conventional that even the Muslim rulers and British officers of the East India Company were sometimes called on to adjudicate in caste disputes.[27]

The brahmanical paradigm of social integration was well established. It operated through the varṇa ideology. Alien and marginal groups were incorporated into the network of castes without damage to their internal kin-structure, customs or belief systems, and they attained a status commensurate with their socio-economic condition. Endogamy along with hypergamy had characterized the varṇa differentiation since its inception in later Vedic times. The principle emerged not from racial exclusiveness or irreducible notions of purity/pollution[28] but with the widening of social distance between dominant and subservient communities. This is clearly indicated by a study[29] of the process which led to the crystallization of priestly groups into an

endogamous brāhmaṇa varṇa towards the end of the Ṛgvedic period. Endogamy was buttressed by the growing strength of patriarchy[30] and proved to be a fitting tool for hierarchical expansion. Agrarian communities of the age of the Buddha appropriated forest lands of hunters and foodgatherers and denounced them as impure and polluting; and this is for the first time in historical sources that we come across the notion of pollution inhering in certain communities. Gradually this led to a shift of emphasis in the varṇa theory from 'function' to 'purity of descent' and explication of the notion of *varṇasaṃkara*,[31] which was again an argument in favour of endogamy. The brahmanical paradigm of social integration was flexible enough to allow the absorption of influential chiefly or priestly lineages of tribal origin into kṣatriya and brāhmaṇa castes, but the majority of the tribal groups being economically backward inflated the rank of the śūdras. By early medieval times the disparities in certain regions were so steep that the concept of a *pañcama* (fifth) varṇa or *varṇetaras* (outcastes) was floated. We have shown[32] that caste ideology has not remained static. It has undergone important modifications in different epochs to adapt to changed material conditions. But the integrative principle remained hierarchical, legitimizing social inequality. It is noteworthy that the *Devala Smṛti*[33] which tries to meet the challenge of Islam and prescribes expiatory rites for the reassimilation of those men and women who were forcibly made to live with the *mlecchas* and partake of the forbidden food, does so within the framework of the varṇa rules.

The situation changed in colonial times. It is held that the introduction of Western education exposed the Indian intelligentsia to the ideas of social equality, democracy and humanism, and this made them acutely aware of the evils prevailing among themselves. The activities of Christian missionaries too put Hindus on the defensive. The orientalist discovery of the civilization and culture of ancient India, however, generated the revivalist-reformist movements of the nineteenth century. These sought to identify an original unitary version of Hinduism consisting of humanistic, universal principles and denounced the caste system, child marriage, the custom of *satī*,

etc. Thus, whereas Rammohun Roy referred to the authority of the Upaniṣads, Dayananda Saraswati gave a call to go back to the four Vedas. Both rejected idolatry and Puranic rituals.

The main contribution of Rammohun Roy lies in encouraging a rationalistic world-view and the uplift of women. But while he opposed caste distinctions, he did not entrust anyone but a brāhmaṇa with the duty of reciting the Vedas and Upaniṣads in his Samaj. The activities of the Brahmo Samaj were mainly confined to the educated middle class; it did not involve the masses. However, Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj was more forthright and attempted to unite the Hindus by rejecting the existing caste system and transforming polytheistic Hinduism into a monotheistic, 'pristine' Vedic religion, organized and proselytizing. Thus he provided a new paradigm of Hindu integration related to the acceptance of a belief system which was to be the basis for internal cohesion and assimilation of outsiders.

It is generally held that the Arya Samaj was a thoroughly indigenous movement and its doctrines owed nothing to the West.[34] In this respect it represents an antithesis to the Brahmo Samaj, which had tried to combine what it considered best in the western and eastern ideologies. Nevertheless, Jordens[35] is right to hold that in formulating his unique doctrine that the four Vedas are revelations containing the eternal wisdom of God and the only authentic source of uncorrupted Ārya Dharma, Dayananda was decisively influenced by the dogma of Protestant missionaries and Muslim theologians that God has revealed himself in a book. There had certainly been a long tradition of regarding the Vedas as eternal knowledge revealed by God in philosophical systems such as Yoga and Nyāya,[36] but Dayananda's exclusive emphasis on the hymns to the exclusion of the rest of Vedic literature was a novel innovation and he went far beyond the orthodox traditional belief in asserting that the Vedic Saṃhitās were the epitome of all knowledge, physical and metaphysical.

Dayananda's concept of what constitutes the Veda, his unorthodox interpretation of the Saṃhitās, his theory of creation and the myth of an egalitarian, universal golden age in pre-*Mahābhārata* times, were all significant ideological tools for

denouncing evil customs and idolatrous beliefs and practices as later accretions, and these prepared the ground for a new national and communal awakening. He could also reject the pluralistic interpretations of Hinduism and explicate the exclusive truth of the Veda, bringing it in accord with reason and available scientific knowledge. He is criticized for his 'narrow exclusivism', which made him condemn all other religions of the day, Jainism, Islam and Christianity; but it is to be kept in mind that he was reacting to the 'selective Christianity consciously adapted for colonial consumption' by Christian missionaries, and the attack of Muslim maulavis in a hostile competitive atmosphere created by colonial rule. Following the typology of religion as schematized by Bruce Lincoln[37] one may argue that a narrowly puritanical attitude is typical of the 'religion of resistance', which defines itself in opposition to the 'religion of the status quo'. In this case, traditional Hinduism represented the 'religion of the status quo' which was promoted and upheld by the orthodox Hindu elite, who manipulated the Hindu authority structure and felt sufficiently threatened by the anti-ritual and anti-caste teachings of Dayananda to denounce him as the destroyer of the Vedas. His translation of the Vedas into Hindi to make them accessible to all, without discrimination, was a revolutionary step for the nineteenth century. It was a direct attack on the special privileges of the traditional elite, sapping the foundations of their authority. Dayananda's support came largely from the 'marginal intelligentsia', which could include some members of the traditional elite displaced by colonial rule, but largely consisted of a new elite arising out of the middle stratum which had benefited to some extent from the processes of modernization and was becoming aware of the need for social reform and self-respect.

Jordens has shown that the founding members of the Arya Samaj in Bombay (1875) were moderately educated persons engaged in trade or clerical services and other professions. He also explores the caste identities of these members and points out that the leaders belonged mostly to the trading castes which had recently acquired prosperity through the development of the cotton trade and industry. The number of brāhmaṇa members

too was not inconsiderable, but they mostly belonged to the lower strata of school teachers and clerks and not to the brāhmaṇa intelligentsia. Twenty-eight per cent of the brāhmaṇa members were students; and brāhmaṇa membership declined over the years. Later when Dayananda shifted his scene of activity to Punjab, there too the majority of his supporters came from the khatri caste, which had benefited in recent decades by education, professional jobs and trade, but in the traditional status hierarchy held an intermediate position ranking below the brāhmaṇas and the aristocracy. In western U.P. the movement had a broader base as the modernizing process had affected a more diversified section of society; but the trading classes continued to preponderate. Thus it was basically a movement of the literate, urban classes, winning a large number of adherents among those who had particular reason to be dissatisfied with the traditional taboos and hierarchical aspects of the caste system.

Dayananda denied the validity of *jāti* divisions and spoke only of the varṇas, which in his view were secular categories, a rational division of labour into four functional classes based originally on merit and qualifications of the individual, but later degenerating into hereditary castes. He aimed at making his Ārya Dharma a universal religion based not on birth but on the acceptance of general principles. The ten fundamental rules of the Arya Samaj, although couched in very broad terms, nevertheless emphasize the missionary spirit of the movement in laying down that one should not remain satisfied with one's own progress but should make an active effort to destroy ignorance and uplift all. The movement since its inception aimed at proselytization. Dayananda reinterpreted the *śuddhi* ritual and made it an instrument of conversion to Hinduism redefining its essence as belief not birth. Thus in theory now the whole world could be converted to the Arya Dharma.

Nevertheless, the actual cases of *śuddhi* in the life-time of Dayananda were of a few apostate Hindus who sought readmission to the Hindu faith. The *śuddhi* movement gained momentum in the early twentieth century when communities and not just individuals were targeted for conversion to meet the threat of Christian missionary activities and increase the

numerical strength of Hindus, who had been registering a decline in the Census reports. Some Rajput groups such as the Malkhans, who had been converted to Islam but retained a good deal of their ancestral faith, were persuaded to return to the Hindu fold, but it was mainly the outcastes or low caste groups among whom the *śuddhi* movement made a greater impact.

Thus the consciousness that political battles can no longer be fought out within the elite, that numbers mean access to power and economic opportunities, brought into focus castes which were regarded hitherto as outside the varṇa system or too lowly to be taken into reckoning. Their conversion to Islam or Sikhism does not seem to have aroused much resentment or a sense of loss in the earlier centuries, but the political situation had now changed. It is said that in order to stop their conversion to other faiths and forge closer links with the wider Hindu community the Arya Samaji propagandists adopted the same methods as those of Christian missionaries and achieved appreciable success in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh where large numbers of low caste communities such as the Rahtias of Jullundhar and Lahore districts, the Meghs of Sialkot region and Odes of Multan and the 'Chuhras' of Khalapur (north-western Uttar Pradesh), the Shilpakars of Kumaon and to some extent the Jatavs of Agra city, and the Nonias of Senapur were converted to the Arya Samaj. Kenneth W. Jones writes that this changed the social composition of the Samaj in the Punjab. 'The educated elite, the urban vaiśya and brahmanical castes became a minority within the movement, although they maintained their leadership, if not unchallenged, at least undiminished.'[38]

It is not without significance that the *śuddhi* movement continued until the time of partition and petered out thereafter. Moreover, it failed to evolve a specific 'Ārya' social identity restructured on the principles of social equality and secure the permanent adherence of low castes to Arya Samaj, even though in many cases the initiative for *śuddhi* had been taken by the leaders of these castes. In an interesting study[39] of the Arya Samaj and the low castes Ursula Sharma explores the reasons why, in spite of its anti-caste ideology, the Arya Samaj was not able to proselytize and win permanent attachment of the low castes.

She argues that whereas the urban initiators of the *śuddhi* campaigns wanted to rejuvenate Hindu society and establish a truly 'national Hindu culture', the aims of the members of the low castes were more specific. They wished to improve the status of their caste through a process of Sanskritization generated by their association with the Arya Samaj. This created a paradox. The ritual symbols reinterpreted by the Arya Samaj for abolishing status hierarchy were understood differently by low caste audiences who adopted them in the hope of obtaining higher status. When this did not happen they moved towards more secular and political action, associating with political parties and forming bodies like the Scheduled Caste Federation for political purposes. Further, the Arya Samaj did not have a rural base. It could provide only moral support to the low castes in their efforts to raise their status in the villages but could not be very effective once its missionaries withdrew from the locality to their urban base.

However, we may point out that even in urban areas the Arya Samaj has not been able to evolve a distinct social identity; and staunch Arya Samajis often lament the engulfment by Hinduism. The real reason for the failure of the Arya Samaj to establish a separate identity lies in the fact that it could not abolish the caste identity of its members. This reduced it to a mere reformist sect of Hinduism. Hinduism has infinite capacity to tolerate any kind of theology as long as its caste structure remains unharmed. No doubt the Arya Samaj helped in weakening the notions of caste hierarchy or commensal taboos, but the ground for such social change was prepared by the processes of industrialization, which delinked the caste and occupation and made rules against interdining and intermixing difficult to observe. There was no such inherent contradiction with regard to the observance of the rules of endogamy which had the force of a long tradition and continued subordination of women. Moreover, in rural areas where industrialization has not made much impact, the earlier structural relations are bound to prevail and these could not have been abolished merely through the ideological propaganda of the Arya Samajis. The use of traditional symbols such as the Vedic *homa* or the sacred thread for divergent and contradictory

purposes by low caste men on the one hand and the Arya Samaji missionaries on the other highlights an essential aspect of the problem; despite the professed objective of establishing a casteless society the Arya Samaj could not move out of the endogamous caste structure and its attitude towards the low castes remained paternalistic rather than egalitarian. Hence the programme of evolving a fraternal brotherhood was reduced to the consolidation of a Hindu communal identity, basically an upper caste agenda.

Today, the votaries of Hindutva are floating another model of integration, that of 'Rāma-Bhakti' which is supposed to be the rallying point for Hindu integration and simultaneously a litmus test for loyalty to the nation. But this has little to do with history or the problem of social integration of Hindu communities. It is frankly acknowledged by the leadership of this movement that the aim is to ensure a proper place for Hindus in the public realm. And it is no less significant that the symbol chosen for this purpose is one who is famous for upholding the patriarchal norms and the varṇa system, who went to the extent of beheading a śūdra for practising austerities and aspiring for heaven—for that act of transgression of varṇa duties had resulted in the premature death of the son of a brāhmaṇa in his kingdom.[40]

NOTES

1. A. Barth, *The Religions of India* (English tr. by Rev. J. Wood, London, 1881), p. xvii.
2. Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, trs. and eds. H.H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, 1958), p. 21.
3. R.C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (London, 1958), p. 20; idem, *Hinduism* (London, 1962).
4. Fritz Staal, in *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of Fire Altar*, Vol. II (Berkeley, 1983), p. 2.
5. Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York, 1954), p. 102, quoted in Syed Hussein Alatas, 'Problems of Defining Religion', *International Social Science Journal*, XXIX, No. 2, 1977, p. 214.

6 Henrich von Stietencorn, 'Hinduism: On the proper Use of A Deceptive Term', in Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, ed., *Hinduism Reconsidered* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 11-28.

7 Madeleine Biardeau, *Hinduism, The Anthropology of A Civilization* (Delhi, 1989).

8 F.A. Marglin, 'Power, Purity and Pollution: Aspects of the Caste System Reconsidered', *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* n.s., Vol. 11, No. 2 (1977), pp. 245-70; Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History: Trends and Possibilities', *The Indian Historical Review,* Vol. VI (July 1979-January 1980), pp. 1-63, reprinted in R.S. Sharma, ed., *Survey of Research in Economic and Social History of India* (Delhi, 1986), pp. 41-108. Page numbers of the latter are mentioned in the following references.

9 Bruce Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions.*

10 Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus.*

11 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Varṇa Ideology and Social Change', *Social Scientist,* Vol. 19, Nos. 3-4 (March-April 1991), pp. 41-8.

12 Ibid.

13 Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion* (Delhi, 1989), p. 11, fn. 22. Also see Joseph M. Kitgawa, 'The Making of an Historian of Religions', *Criterion,* Vol. 7 (1978).

14 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

15 According to R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism is as much a social system as a religion. See *Hinduism,* p. 8. Also see S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New York, 1973).

16 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p. 11. Italics as in the original.

17 The early Purānas often counterpoise Vedic and Tantric without regarding the latter as a 'heresy' practised by those who were outside the pale. It is recommended that women and śūdras may worship Puranic deities through the Tantric mode of worship as the Vedic mode of worship is open only to the male members of the upper three varṇas. See Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism,* 2nd edn., pp. 152f. What is involved here is the notion of hierarchy of religious levels as a reflection of the empirical reality of social hierarchy and not the other way round.

18 *Religion, Politics and History in India* (Delhi, 1970), p. 16.

19 *Cennabasavapurāṇa*, Chap. LVII, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society* (1968), p. 193.

20 Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India* (Delhi, 1965), p. 2. Among other sects rejecting the authority of the Vedas Renou mentions the Mahānubhāva sect of Maharashtra and Sahajiyas of Bengal. According to Ramakrishna, 'the truth is not in the Vedas; one should act according to the Tantras, not according to the Vedas, the latter are impure from the very fact of being pronounced' (quoted in ibid., p. 3).

21 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p. 217.

22 J. Laine, 'The Notion of "Scripture" in Modern Indian Thought', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 64 (1983), pp. 165-79.

23 Muzaffar Alam, 'Competition and Co-existence: Indo-Islamic Interaction in Medieval North India', *Itinerario*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 (1989), p. 55.

24 Quoted in N.K. Wagle, 'Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra', in Sontheimer and Kulke, eds., op. cit., pp. 55-6.

25 See, for example, *kavitta*, Nos. 420 and 421 in *Bhūṣaṇa Granthāvali*, ed., Visvanatha Prasada Misra (Varanasi, 3rd edn., Samvat 2026), p. 209.

26 Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History* (Shillong, 1985), pp. 20-1; Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History', pp. 49, 56, 71-2.

27 Ibid., p. 89; also see H. Fukazawa, 'State and Caste System (Jati) in the Eighteenth Century Maratha Kingdom', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics,* Vol. IX, No. 1, pp. 32-5.

28 Suvira Jaiswal, Presidential Address, Ancient India Section, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 38th Session (Bhubaneswar, 1977).

29 Supra, pp. 11-13; 53-6.

30 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Studies in Early Indian Social History', pp. 42-4, 73-89.

31 Ibid., pp. 70-3.

32 Suvira Jaiswal, 'Varṇa Ideology and Social Change', pp. 41-9.

33 *Devalasmṛti* in *Smṛtinām̐ Samuaccayaḥ,* Ānandāśrama Sanskṛta Granthāvali, No. 48 (Pune, 1929), pp. 85-9.

34 J. Laine, op. cit., p.173.

35 J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Causes*, (Delhi, 1981).

36 L. Renou, op. cit., pp. 31-2.

37 Bruce Lincoln, 'Notes towards A Theory of Religion and

Revolution', in Bruce Lincoln, ed., *Religion, Rebellion, Revolution* (New York, 1985).

38 *Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Delhi, 1976), p. 214.

39 Ursula Sharma, 'Status Striving and Striving to Abolish Status: The Arya Samaj and the Low Castes', *Social Action,* Vol. 26 (July-September 1976), pp. 214-35.

40 This refers to the story of Śambūka narrated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki (Gita Press edn.), Uttara Kāṇḍa, sarga 75-6.

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The work provides a critique of the current theories of the caste system which locate its essence in endogamy and argues that present morphology of caste is the result of the changes the institution has undergone over centuries of its existence, but the origins are embedded in the ecology of the Vedic cattle-keepers. Processes of patriarchy and state formation have played a crucial role in its evolution and its ideology has made significant conceptual adjustments in the course of its long history without however, abandoning its basic principles.

The work subjects the applicability of the *avante-garde* concepts of 'lineage mode of production' and 'Homo Hierarchicus' to a critical scrutiny. Finally, it points to the role of caste in providing 'unity in diversity' and limiting the impact of social movements such as the Arya Samaj.

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